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THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME



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by HUGH B. CAVE

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THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

Volume 5

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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The Editor's Page

A most interesting letter from a reader in Michigan, Judith B. Lee, contains the inquiry: "I must ask you if your story *Leapers* was based on pure imagination or had some factual beginning. It read like an accounting that actually took place and gave me the creeps to think that such things might have occurred. . . . I live in Michigan, the State of strange occurrences. The Lake Michigan Port of Ludington, for example, where people disappear from the ferry. The strange beast that wanders around, I forget exactly where, and assaults people. And, not to be forgotten, our mysterious 'swamp gas' incident. Not to mention a certain street that is haunted by the ghost of a young girl struck and dragged the full length of it by a motorist who did not realize he had hit her even though, as witnesses reported, she hung on to the fender and beat upon it until she dropped beneath the wheels. The street had to be torn up and replaced, but it did not stop the ghost, who thumps loudly on the fender of any car which travels its length. The mystery of Denton Road where ghost lights can be seen on certain nights and the sounds of a baby crying. Charles Fort wasted his time in commenting on the reports of others; he should have come to Michigan. There is a whole volume of 'happenings' just waiting for explanations. 'Swamp gas' cannot cover them all."

The question is flattering, since it tells me that, for some readers at least, I succeeded in projecting the

feeling that I was trying to project in *Leapers*: that factual events have been combined with imaginary ones. Actually, everything in *Leapers* is invented except the address given in Brooklyn (in 1940, I lived there in an apartment jointly shared with Donald A. Wollheim, Richard Wilson, and others); the actual situation at the New York Public Library in respect to almanacs, etc.; and the dates given for the full moon in the years and months specified. I believe that it was Don who suggested, after reading over the first few incidents, that the scene in *Blood of a Fox* might be fitted in; the way I used it was entirely my own, however.

What I set out to avoid in the revised version was "timeliness". The original version took place in the present—circa 1942—and current events were commented upon in a general way in the philosophical sections.

While it would be fatuous to contend that timeliness is the Mark of the Beast in fiction, no matter what the circumstances, I am convinced that the *attempt to be timely* is what was wrong with a very large percent of the stories I have rejected over the course of some twenty-eight years of reading manuscripts.

By "timeliness" I do not mean setting a story in a current historical situation, providing that the canvas is large enough, but rather building a story upon such ephemeral matters as current jokes, latest sensational headlines, current slogans—political or otherwise, today's fashions, the latest fads in fiction, current aesthetic theories, and so on. I'm sure you can add to the list. A story that is "dated" in the sense that it takes place in 1861, 1942, 1968, etc., is

not necessarily faulted thereby; but a story that is dated by the fads, slang words, slogans, etc., upon which it is built becomes obsolete very quickly. Sometimes it is obsolete before the manuscript gets to an editor or other professional reader at all.

The key phrase above is "upon which it is built". The timely story *depends* upon the freshness and shock value, etc., of its ephemeral elements. It is not really a story but a news item presented in fictional form and presumably containing a beginning, middle, and end. It is pseudo-journalism; and while good journalism has enduring qualities, these are not the qualities of good fiction.

When exceptionally well written, the timely story which is also good humor can have lasting qualities; but the reason for this is simply that the timely element is really not so important as it may have appeared at first glance: the real humor lies in a timeless expression of incongruity and/or human absurdity. The timely element was a tee-off point for the author, who could as easily have started somewhere else and said the same thing. In fact such a story might be rewritten with the timely element deleted entirely and still be recognizably the same story, saying the same thing.

Have you ever noticed that when a new wave of jokes springs up (particularly the ethnic type, but not only the ethnic type), and friends and acquaintances start telling you the very latest, an awful lot of them are jokes you heard years and years ago, slightly revised to fit the new wave; and some have been hastily revised from yesterday's new wave?

New waves are usually new fakes, just as "new moralities" are usually

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by

Robert E. Howard

*The Winter issue is now on sale—
or see page 125*

the oldest sins, the newest kinds of ways. (How I wish I'd said that originally! Alas, Shakespeare beat me to the draw again.)

Good stories can be written with a root of centuries-old jokes, simply because the reason that these jokes have endured and can seem as funny to us as they did to our ancestors is that they are based on unchanging, universal aspects of the human condition. Adapting an old joke to a current situation can make for instant entertainment—but good only for the moment. A story's survival factor rests upon its relatively imperishable elements, not its surface glitter, however sparkling at the moment of production. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*, and W. S. Gilbert's librettos remain hilarious because of the depths beneath the glitter; but in both, a number of elements which may perhaps have brought the heartiest guffaws from the audiences of their times are at the very best no more than quaint today.

When I see a manuscript containing a story that is based upon current or more-or-less recent atrocities which made headlines in the papers, I can nearly always win a bet with myself that this will reveal an author with very little imagination, or an undeveloped imagination. I remember John Campbell telling me in 1938, or thereabouts, how, after the "Wrong-Way Corrigan" episode, he found himself deluged with manuscripts (mostly from unknowns) wherein the protagonist "accidentally" winds up somewhere he/she has been officially forbidden to go. And, he stressed, that was *all* these stories were about.

If a story is going to be based upon current or recent fact, or to combine such fact with invention, the

"news" element should be nothing more than trimming, or at most a superstructure—*never a foundation*. A horror story rooted in the Chicago Riots of 1968 (the Democratic National Convention) would most likely be nothing more than a tiresome propaganda piece, or polemic. But a horror story rooted in the universal elements behind, say, both the Boston Massacre and the Chicago Riot—the universal elements of deliberate provocation; planned "spontaneity" designed to engulf as many other ("innocent" in the simple-minded sense) victims as possible; and carefully slanted publicity designed to conceal the provocation while exaggerating the response to it—might be effective. (The planners of the Chicago incident might have been inspired by Marx and Lenin and Stalin, etc.; but they could have just as easily been inspired by our own Samuel Adams, who engineered the Boston Massacre, and our own Paul Revere, whose engraved falsifications of it produced exactly the effect that was intended.)

The foundation of a horror story must lie in what are called the "demonic" elements of human nature; or in deep-rooted fears that are triggered off by events which appear to violate "natural" laws. Common, everyday criminality just won't do, even when today's trends in crime seem to be particularly frightening, although such things might make a good base for mundane mystery tales, spy stories, etc. Meeting the tiger in the jungle, makes for a good adventure story; meeting the escaped tiger on the city streets makes for a good terror tale; but when the tiger suddenly appears in your apartment, ah, now we're on the track of a horror story. RAWL

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Spawn Of Inferno

by *Hugh B. Cave*

(author of *The Ghoul Gallery*)

IT IS A WELL-REMEMBERED FACT, at least in certain circles, that in the year 184—the quiet little city of Darbury, in western Massachusetts, was for a brief interlude of blackness completely in the grip of mortal terror. From time eternal, darkness has brought fear; and the darkness that swept down on the streets and homes of Darbury, during those hours of madness, was a thousand times more intense than night. Under cover of it, as under the cover of an impenetrable fog, murders were done and houses looted. For a sudden brief interval of horror, the entire city stopped breathing and became wrapped in a living layer of pitch.

Learned men, of course, made haste to offer explanations. The sun, they said, had done something unusual. Or an unknown planet had come between Earth and sun, in some dizzy flight through the ether. Or a mighty magnetic force had suddenly seized that particular portion of Earth's crust in its grip.

The people, ignorant of even the rudiments of science, accepted those idiotic explanations and believed them. Years later, when I read of that "dark interlude," I too believed the current explanations. Being a man of medicine, I knew no more of advanced science than the ordinary layman.

But today, with those hours of terror long since past and forgotten, I found something else. I had chanced, as was often my habit, to visit the library of old Doctor Bruce Moller, who died several years ago at

HUGH B. CAVE first appeared in the weird magazines in 1932, and came to the attention of readers when his story, *The Brotherhood of Blood*, was given a special announcement in the April issue of *WEIRD TALES*. It appeared in the May issue, with a particularly striking cover design based upon it by C. C. Senf. Whether this May issue appeared on the newsstands before the June 1932 issue of *STRANGE TALES*, which had just shifted from bi-monthly to quarterly appearance, escapes our memory. At any rate, that June issue bore a cover painting by H.W. Wesso, illustrating Mr. Cave's short story *Stragella*; and he would appear twice more in that magazine before its untimely demise with the January 1933 issue, which went on sale in October 1932.

Cave had a dozen stories in *WEIRD TALES* between the May 1932 and the June/July 1939 issues, and also appeared in *ORIENTAL STORIES* and *THE MAGIC CARPET*, also edited by Farnsworth Wright. Between his first and last appearances here he had become a "name" writer for the various detective and mystery-terror magazines, and some included a few genuine "weird" tales, and I should not be astonished to learn that his range of pulp writing was larger than this. At least one of his stories, *The Watcher in the Green Room*, has appeared in anthologies; and *The Ghoul Gallery*, which we ran in our 15th issue (Spring 1967) was generally well received by you, the readers.

the age of ninety-four. In his musty rooms today I prowled from one shelf to another until, by some queer twist of fortune, I picked up an old, withered thing in red leather covers. The title of it was *Creatures of the Beyond*—strangely significant in view of the yellow manuscript that lay between its pages!

The first sheet of that manuscript was missing. I give the rest of it here precisely as it was set down in the fine, condensed handwriting of Doctor Moller, in the thick sheaf of papers that I found in his library. When I say that I had known Doctor Moller for several years, and known him to be an utterly sane and honest man, I think I have said enough. Here is Doctor Moller's account:

... have just come from the home of Antone Sergio. He is a peculiar man, Sergio, growing older and visibly weaker with each successive time that I see him. Never have I seen a man so cynical and bitter toward mankind. He has, of course, no living kin. Lives alone in that house of gloom on Lantor Street, with no companion other than the rat-faced Lober, his assistant.

When I went there today, Sergio himself let me in the front door; and

as I followed him down the hall I felt that I was following a man already dead, or following some strange jungle creature, shaggy and deformed. He is not actually deformed, in the medical sense of the word, but his crouching shuffle is like the walking of an anthropoid ape. To-day, for the first time, I felt that I feared him.

He took me at once to the library, where he sat down abruptly and faced me, leaving me to stand ill at ease and considerably confused by his hostile attitude.

"Moller," he said—he pronounces my name with that peculiar accent of his, until it sounds like Merler—"you have come here today to examine me?"

His tone was practically a challenge. I felt that he hated me, and it was a most uncomfortable feeling.

"You've put yourself in my care." I scowled. "If you wish to consult another physician. Sergio, that's your privilege. But as long as I'm looking after you, it's my duty to come here."

He studied me for some time, as if he would read my mind and find there some other reason for my coming. I believe he suspected me of prying into his scientific secrets.

"Yes," he muttered, "it is your duty to come. I am not well, of course. My head . . ." And then suddenly he got to his feet, glaring at me with those deep, close-set eyes of his. "But you would like to know what I do in this house, Moller, would you not? You're curious! You want to snoop around and find out things!"

He was completely transformed. I did not dare to resist him when he seized my arm and dragged me to the door. His grip was heavy; his fingers dug savagely into my coat; his eyes were afire with some unholy glow of triumph.

He led me then down the long corridor that extends through the entire lower floor of the house; and, at the end of it, pushed me into a narrow, ill-lighted room that lay beyond. Before I had taken two steps over the threshold, I knew that the room was his laboratory, the place where he spent hours and days at a time, pottering about with his instruments.

"I will not have you coming here at all hours," he snapped irritably. "You come to spy on me!"

I protested. He smothered my protest with a burst of vehemence which startled me.

"I would rather tell you what I do here! *Tell* you, do you understand? I won't have you prowling about like a thief in the night. Because I am not well, you use me as an excuse to come here. I will show

you what is in this room, and then I will defy you! Do you hear?"

He was standing with his arms half lifted, facing me. His tangled head of white hair came only to my shoulders; and beyond him I could see his assistant, Lober, standing at the far end of the room, staring mutely toward us.

Then Sergio seized my arm again and pulled me to a wooden bench that extended from one end of the chamber to the other, along the wall. As he bent over it, ignoring me for an instant, I saw a pile of loose papers, charts. With one of these in his hand, he turned on me again.

"You're not a scientist," he declared. He knew I was not; yet I could tell from the triumph in his voice that it gave him pleasure to mock my ignorance. "Then look here! Look!"

He lifted the chart to my eyes. I studied it intently, and scowled at it. It seemed to me to be nothing more than a huge circular outline, crossed with intricate perpendicular and horizontal markings which signified nothing.

"You think you know all the secrets of this paltry universe of ours," he gloated. "You've read the Bible and studied your medical books, and you're quite certain of everything under the sun. You blind fool! I'm going to tell you some truths!"

And he told me. It was madness. He spoke of a world of darkness; he described horrible shapeless denizens of what he called the Dimension of Death. He was not concerned with ordinary beliefs of a spirit world, or of communication between the dead and the living. Good heavens, no! His talk was of mighty elementals—vicious monsters which were hovering within reach, black and hungry, separated only by what he termed the "walls of dimension." I can see no good in repeating such madness here.

"Do you know what would happen, Moller," he demanded, "if the gate were opened? If these demons of the Death Dimension should discover a doorway to our puny Earth?"

I did not trouble to answer him. I wanted very much to go away; yet there was a quality of eagerness in his voice that fascinated me. Lober, too, was listening from his place at the other end of the chamber. He had not moved, but he had stopped his work, so that the room was utterly silent except for the shrill voice of my patient.

As for Sergio, he stared at me in silence for some time. Then, slowly, the glare in his eyes died. He laughed softly. "Come," he said. "I'll show you."

He took me into the shadows, where the light was so dim that I could

scarcely see the things about me. As we went, he began once again to talk. This time his voice was soft, no longer shrill with excitement.

"There is a gateway, Moller," he said. "It is the door to hell. Some day I will open it, and then you will know that I speak truth. Look there."

I followed him a dozen more paces, and there, almost invisible, I saw a solid block of some unnamed metal—something that looked for the world like a huge square of carborundum. It was colorless and opaque, crystalline in appearance, and yet the many tiny facets gave off no light. About four feet square it seemed, with a score of thin wires attached to its surface. My companion was pointing, with a hand that was very careful not to reach too close, to the medley of wires.

"What is it?" he said. "Perhaps some day I'll tell you, Moller. It is the result of most of my life. A combination of four substances, fused together under terrific heat. Lifeless. Dead. Not a spark of power in it.

"But here"—his hand jerked aside to fall on a huge, polished machine—"here is the thing that gives it life! And in the core of that block, Moller, are mirrors. Hundreds of them. Have you ever tried to place three right angles at right angles to one another? No? Try it, Moller. Then you will realize what I mean when I tell you that, inside that mass, are *seven* of them!"

His voice had, strangely enough, become shrill again. He was intensely excited. His fingers closed over a black-handled switch at the edge of the table beside him. He looked first at me, then at the switch. Then he said sharply:

"A moment after I have thrown this, the world will know horror. Do you hear, Moller? Do you understand? In the space of one moment I can release into this dimension a horde of demons from the Land of Death! And I can control them! I can make them do as I will!"

He stood rigid. There was no color in his face; it was ghastly white with emotion.

"Do you know why I have told you this?" he rasped. "Because I wish to! Because I want some living person to know what is happening when the world becomes black and cold with the vileness of the Death Dimension! Because you are an ignorant, stupid fool without imagination—and will not believe me! Now go!"

He pointed to the door. I think he would have struck me if I had not obeyed him. Yet as I left the room I was conscious of a pair of staring eyes—Lober's eyes—following me. Then, a few moments later, I had traversed the corridors and stood on the stone steps of that madhouse.

I am writing this down because, though I believe the whole affair to be a fantastic hoax, I have been possessed with a most unnatural sense of foreboding ever since leaving Antone Sergio's house. The sight of him, white-haired, bitter, defiant, standing in that dimly lighted room filled with strange instruments of science, has left an impression upon me that I can not easily erase.

Perhaps some day I shall laugh at myself for recording such nonsense; but the thought comes to me that after all I am merely a man of medicine, ignorant of the secrets of science and metaphysics. This man knows more than I, certainly; and if he has the power he claims to have, he will not hesitate to use it! He is alone in the world and, as I have said, bitter in his relations with it. He would send it to destruction, if he could, with a grim laugh.

However, there is nothing more to say now. Perhaps at some later day I may have something to add to this account.

It is now two days since my uncanny visit to Antone Sergio's home. For twenty-four hours after writing the first part of this account of my relations with him, I considered myself an utter fool for doing so. Now, after what has happened—though it may have no direct connection with Sergio's "machine"—I think myself a fool no longer!

Last evening, about seven o'clock, a street urchin came to my office in the square. I was in at the time (I still reside in the little suite of rooms at the rear of the office) and he placed in my hands a sealed envelope.

The envelope—I have it before me now—is gray in color and bears in black ink my name. Bruce Moller. The only significant due to the handwriting is the fact that the words are written in a strained, back-handed manner, as if the writer were unused to such an angle.

But the contents needed no detailed study. They were inscribed in the same strained characters, and the words were these:

"You are perhaps prepared for death, Doctor Moller? If not, prepare yourself, for you have less than twenty-four hours to live. You are to be destroyed."

That was all. There was no signature, no fantastic details such as usually accompany uncouth threats of violence. No reason for my impending death; merely a straightforward statement that I should die!

For an hour, perhaps, I studied the note. During that interval I went over my past history with the utmost care, seeking to remember the name

of a man who might desire to murder me. My practice has been a successful one; I have caused no deaths on the operating-table, nor have I been indirectly associated with any deaths. I could find no reason why any sane man should wish to destroy me.

I had put the note down with a shrug, and was about to retire, when the door of my room echoed to a slight knock. Before I could cross the room, the door opened. My old colleague, Pedersen, stood there on the sill.

He came forward quietly. Pedersen is a stolid chap who seldom shows excitement; he is large and strong as an ox; it was he who founded the Darbury Athletic Club. And the first thing I noticed, as he advanced toward me, the the gray envelope in his fist. An envelope precisely the same as the one that lay at that moment on my table!

"I've received the most infernal threat, Moller," he said. "Twenty-four hours they give me to live. And the damned thing is not signed!"

That was like Pedersen; he is the sort of fellow who would pay more attention to the irregularity of form than to the warning of destruction. When I turned and indicated the note that lay on my own table, he merely went to it, picked it up, and read it. Then he replaced it.

"What do you think, Moller?" he demanded, swinging on me. "Same writing, same paper. Sent, of course, by the same man. What man in Darbury or the surrounding district might wish to have us both murdered?"

I had no answer. He was merely repeating a question to which I had already failed to find an answer—except that he now included himself in it.

"I was on my way to After Street, Moller, when this thing was thrust into my hand," he frowned. "It was dark, and I missed seeing the chap's face. Small fellow, he was—rather shrivelled. Of course, I didn't see him closely. He didn't intend me to. When I finally stopped under a street lamp and read the note—took me some time, too, in the gaslight—he was gone."

I nodded. "Mine," I said, "came by messenger, an hour ago. I'd better keep in touch with you. There may be something behind these notes that we don't understand." And as I spoke, I could not get away from his description of the man who had waylaid him: "Small fellow, rather shrivelled." Could it have been Sergio? Did my half-mad patient really believe in the power of his "Gateway to the Death Dimension," and intend to throw that queer black-handled switch?

I said good-night to Pedersen rather lamely, and stood at the door,

listening to the beat of his footsteps on the stairs. Then, shutting the door quietly, I went back to the table and once again took up that gray envelope.

That was last night. I am wondering, as I write this, what the next move in our little comedy will be!

I have just learned, by messenger, that Vernon, too, has received a threat of death. Vernon, in his note, describes the letter he received (it came by runner, as mine did) as being "written on gray paper in a queerly reversed script, as if the fellow had made a definite effort to disguise his hand." He says further: "I can't see any reason for the thing, Moller. Good Lord, I've been in medical work for a good many years, but I don't believe I've made any enemies as severe as this. He can murder me if he likes, though I'm inclined to believe the whole thing is a hoax; but what will it get him? I've no money—never knew a medical man yet who did have!—and the most he can get is the satisfaction of seeing my dead carcass. Have you any explanation?"

An explanation? No, I had none. When I had finished reading the note, I was no nearer a solution than before. But now, thank God, I am!

It came to me a moment ago. Vernon, Pedersen, and I—what had we three done together at any time? And then, with a start, I realized the truth. It was we three who condemned Carmen Veda to the asylum for the insane, less than a month ago. The case had been brought to us for examination, had been separately analyzed by each of us. We had found the girl to be completely insane, and had recommended that she be confined.

But these notes of murder—who could have sent them? I had myself carefully looked up the girl's history and discovered that she had no relatives. Perhaps, if she had had someone to care for her, we should have been less severe in our decision; but she had been friendless, destitute, completely alone. A pretty girl, too, and hardly more than twenty; but youth and beauty are no guarantee against an unbalanced mind. Pedersen, especially, had maintained that she would be better cared for in the institution than if she were allowed to prowl the streets in her helpless condition. And so, at the recommendation of the three of us (the law requires more than a single testimony in such a case) the girl was put away.

And so, too, I have stumbled on the solution—if that is the solution—of our mysterious threats. What will follow now, I do not know; but I

shall make haste to acquaint both Pedersen and Vernon with my discovery. It is better that they be warned at once of their danger. The allotted twenty-four hours will be up soon. Whatever is to be done must be done at once. It is morning now, and daylight, and I assume that we are safe enough until nightfall. When darkness comes, I intend to remain in my rooms and be ready for . . .

It is three weeks now since I wrote that last interrupted line of this narrative. As I worked over the manuscript, I was sitting at my table by the window so that the light would reach me.

And then, in the midst of my efforts, the room in which I sat became completely black. Black, I say — not merely dark!

It did not come suddenly. To be truthful, I do not know just how it did come. I was engrossed in my account and became conscious, all at once, that the chamber was no longer warm with sunlight. It was as if a great black cloud had slowly obscured the sun. That was my first impression.

I got up, groping and bewildered, and went to the window. Outside, the square was a blur of pitch; and even as I watched, motionless and completely astonished, it became a complete void. I could see nothing; not even the outline of the First Unitarian Church and the tower, I remember how deeply that fact impressed me; for on the blackest of black nights the tower inevitably loomed against the sky line a spear-point sentinel, one shadow against another. Now there was no shadow. There was nothing!

Dazed, and vaguely afraid, I went stumbling back across the room to my table, and lit the lamp there. By its feeble glow I could see the face of the clock on the mantel. The hour was eleven o'clock *in the morning*.

As I turned away, a single thought possessed me, to the exclusion of everything else. This uncanny darkness was a dreadful thing, to be sure — it was utterly without explanation — but the danger that lay *in* the darkness was what spurred me on. I must go to Pedersen, go to Vernon, and warn them. In this vicious blackness, brought on by some unearthly phenomenon, they were doubly in peril. Whoever had written those notes, threatening us with destruction, would no doubt take advantage of the sheltering gloom and creep upon us like a shadow.

A shadow! The thought held mocking humor. Even as I tugged on my coat and threw open the door of my room, the lamplight from my table was throwing shadowy, shapeless forms over the walls behind me. The light itself was being smothered, as effectively as if armless hands

were lowering a shroud over its wick. As I groped down the stairs, the darkness triumphed. With macabre significance it welled out and around me, burying me.

How I found Pedersen's home—how I succeeded in getting across the square—I do not quite know. At every step I was conscious of muffled excited voices: voices filled with fear and terror. Shapes brushed past me. At intervals, as I stumbled blindly along, things struck against me, thrusting me aside. I heard screams—women's screams—from nowhere. Once I heard a screech almost at my feet, and then the snarling, animal-like sounds of two bodies fighting in the gutter.

For perhaps half an hour I hurried on; finding my way by instinct and because I had traversed the same route so many times before. As I went, I heard the tower clock strike the half-hour almost directly above me; yet I could see nothing—not even the outlines of the buildings I stumbled against. Voices—things—hurrying past, stumbling over one another, lurching into me, snatching at me, cursing, screaming—there was nothing more.

I knew, too, that under cover of the blackness murders were being committed, and the blackness itself was murder. It was no ordinary gloom; it was alive with a thin, tenuous, almost inaudible whining sound that seemed to come from the very bowels of it. It was a living, viscous thing, or a million living things—a wave of slithering, down-pressing exhalation, utterly vile and evil. Within it, the alley rats were abroad, gloating over their opportunity for plunder. More than once I heard cries of abject horror, so close that I might have reached out and touched the women who uttered them; and they were cut short as unseen filthy paws closed over the lips of the unfortunate victims.

And so I reached Pedersen's home. I fell while climbing the steps; and to my surprise the door hung wide. Mechanically I stepped into the hall. Not a sound came from the big structure above me. There was no light, no lamp burning.

I called aloud, shouting my friend's name. The empty rooms only echoed my own outcry. And then—I say this with no attempt to be dramatic—an unutterable fear came over me.

For a moment I stood there in the hall, undecided whether to turn and run or to advance further. The living darkness was in my eyes, in my throat, vibrant with its high-pitched *whirring* sound and hideous with a stench of fetid decay. It hung here, in the corridor of Pedersen's home, a thousand times more ugly than in the street outside. It was stalking me.

Then I found false courage. Resolved to find my friend or at least discover where he had gone, I crept forward. I say "crept"—it was creeping, nothing more. With both hands outflung before me as a barrier of defense, I went slowly down the hall. Somehow in the dark I found the door of Pedersen's library, the room where he spent most of his time. And this door, too, was open. Never in all the years I had known Pedersen, had he gone off and left the door of his most private sanctum open.

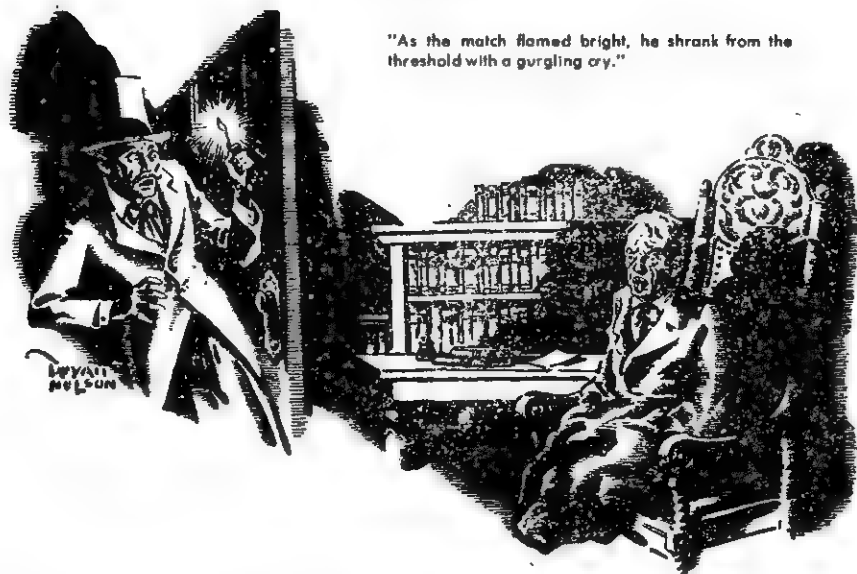
Here I struck a match. The sulfur sputtered and suddenly flared bright; and I shrank from the threshold with a gurgling cry. I saw that scene only for an instant; yet as I write this account three weeks later, it is still vivid and frightful. Before me lay the narrow, book-lined room with its single table. A huge carved chair stood by the table; and in that chair, staring straight toward me, sat Pedersen.

When I say that the man's face was a mask of unspeakable horror, I mean just that. I have seen torment before, where torment is a routine thing. I have handled crushed, broken bodies on the operating-table; I have watched men and women die slow deaths when the more merciful thing would have been a bullet. But Pedersen's face, when I looked into it at that moment, was the essence of all agony. The eyes protruded like sticks of charcoal; the tongue was a black, bloated, lolling horror. And the body below that was no body at all, but a shapeless, bloody mass of sodden pulp, propped there in mockery.

I did not strike another match. Why I did not whirl about and rush away, I do not know. Perhaps it was loyalty that dragged me to my friend's side; perhaps it was something else which is better left unexplained. I know that I paced forward and stood over him, and I was aware of a stench that did not come from his mutilated body. The entire chamber was filled with it—a reek of obscene rot that was strangely like the smell of sour milk. It hung about the body like a malignant *presence*, or the exhalations of some malignant presence which *had* been here.

It was that vileness, more than anything else, which thrust me back and caused me to realize my position. Good God, I was standing here like a blind man, stiff with horror, while another of my friends was in danger of the same death! If the murderer had found one victim, he would seek a second. He would go to Vernon's rooms, or possibly to mine. Wherever he went, I must reach there first!

I stumbled out of the room, along the passage to the door. As I went out into the utter blackness of the street, I realized for the first time that I was cold, horribly cold. It was as though every spark of heat and



"As the match flamed bright, he shrank from the threshold with a gurgling cry."

radiation had been removed. The pavement was like ice. The very air, as I breathed it, seemed to penetrate my lungs with needle-like sharpness.

I should have known, then, what had happened. That combination of darkness and cold, coming so soon after Antone Sergio's threats of annihilation, should have brought the solution to me in a flash. But it did not. At that moment I could think of but one thing—that I must get to Vernon at once, without an instant's delay. The horror of my own situation was, during that interim of madness, a secondary thing. I scarcely heard the screams and cries that echoed about me as I hurried through the veil. I hardly felt the lunging shapes that struck out at me. I must get to Vernon! To Vernon!

His rooms were half a mile distant, across the square again. I walked quickly, as quickly as I dared. There were no lights to guide me. Had there been—had the lamp-lighters come out of their holes and created their usual friendly patches of yellow glow in the dark—I might have been less terrified. The street lamps would not have been much, to be sure. Merely flickering haloes of uncertain light at rare intervals. But they would have enabled me to see the shadowed outlines of my surroundings. They would have been beacons, and by groping from one

to another I might have found my way across the square, and reached that obscure by-street which harbored my friend's rooms, with more haste.

Yet I knew, even as I cursed the veil, that those same street lamps would have availed nothing. Good heavens, if this infernal dark had smothered sunlight, how could artificial flames of gaslight prevail against it? Even the insignificant match which I had struck in Pedersen's library—even that had been extinguished. *Extinguished*, I say! It had not burned itself out; it had been snuffed out, choked out, annihilated by this foul and monstrous darkness which was a living, breathing, whining entity!

God, how I wanted light! Had there been even a faint glow from the upper window of Vernon's rooms, as I approached, I might have shouted for joy. But there was none; there was nothing. I stumbled up the steps; and the lower door, like the door of Pedersen's house, swung wide before me. I rushed into the hall, shouting my friend's name. There was no response. I heard no sound at all as I ascended the winding staircase. The door on the upper landing, too, was ajar. I remember clawing my way along the wall and colliding with it, and being almost grateful for its very presence. Here at last was something sane and solid; here were familiar surroundings, albeit lightless and silent. Vernon would be inside, and I could end my horrible pursuit of shadows. Vernon was a level-headed, cool fellow, rugged and indifferent to danger. He would laugh at my fears and find an explanation for the awful darkness and cold which had descended upon us.

I pushed the door wide, eagerly. With one hand on the knob and one foot poised over the sill, I became rigid. A cry of stark terror jangled from my lips, and I remember hearing it echo and re-echo through the upper reaches of the structure above me.

It is hard to convey the full awfulness of that scene. In the first place, the room was not dark; it was alight with an unearthly greenish glow which emanated from the uncouth shape before me. No hue of heaven or hell was ever like that oily, viscous mass of writhing vapor, dangling halfway between floor and ceiling, above Vernon's chair. No living thing born of woman was ever even remotely like that hideous abhorrence. No stench from the foulest slaughter-house ever approached that vile reek of living death and embryonic putrescence.

The thing had no certain outlines, no definite form. It possessed no single human characteristic—arms, legs, or face. It was a thousand times more horrible than any twisted mockery of human life. It was like a monstrous malformed devil-fish with bloated, swollen tentacles; and from

the very center of its loathsome mass came the sound of its breathing.

Breathing, I call it! God, that sound! Like a gigantic slug the thing enveloped Vernon's chair—and it was *eating*! I could hear the sucking of its unseen maw. I could hear its shapeless lips—if it *had* lips—drooling blood and tearing flesh. I could hear bones snapping, splintering, grinding . . .

And then I saw!

People have asked me, since that night of inferno, why I refuse to work over the operating-table; why I shudder at the sight of torn flesh. They say I am getting old and fearful of using the knife. But no fear of old age can ever be like the awful torment of that instant!

Before my eyes the vile thing moved. Would to God I had stepped back out of range of vision; but I stood there, transfixed, and watched. The monster slithered sidewise, to fasten itself more securely on its victim. For perhaps five seconds I gazed upon the mangled, pulpy shape beneath it—the pitiful form which had once been Vernon.

Then I ran.

The thing did not follow me. I doubt if it even realized my presence, or cared. I stumbled blindly, madly, down the corridor. I descended the staircase at crazy speed. In another instant I was outside, running, with a dead, cold fear in my heart, toward Lantor Street and the gloomy house which held Antone Sergo's terrible machine.

I remember little of that wild flight. The black streets were practically abandoned, and so cold that I could scarcely breathe. I raced through Ames Street, on the south side of the square, and gasped recklessly on. Once or twice I heard those all-too-familiar sounds which told their grim story of the horrors that were going on in cover of the dark. A woman screamed; men fought; a child ran from me in terror, sobbing pitifully. Then the gravel path and stone steps of Sergio's house lay before me. The heavy door opened to my thrust. I was in the unlighted corridor, reeling toward the room which had given birth to all the horrors of hell.

I groped to the bottom of the winding staircase. All about me, as I felt my way to the upper level, hung that shrill, thin, whining noise which was the voice of the living dark. Here, near its source, it was like a wail triumphant; it was the drone of a million invisible insects, giving out sound and sense and odor.

And then I heard something else—something human and sinister. A sharp intake of breath; a rustle of loose clothing. I had reached the top

of the stairs, and I stopped abruptly. In that opaque veil I could see nothing, yet I sensed the presence of a hostile creature close to me. When I heard that sudden rush of feet, and the snarling voice, I was stiff and poised for contact.

A lunging, clawing form fell upon me. I did not step back. Had I retreated, the weight of the fiend who battled with me would have hurled me against the banister, and down over it to certain death. Instead, I struck out as best I could. I am young enough and strong enough to be a match for anything my size, and this clawing thing was hardly as strong as I. He was like a small, savage monkey, hurling his body against mine with insane fury. I did the only thing possible—swung about so that his body was wedged between me and the wall, and struck upward with all my strength. The clawing thing became suddenly silent. His fingers loosened their grip on my throat. When I stepped back, he slumped to the floor.

He was not dead, of course. His rat-like face glared up at me; and that face, even in the darkness and in defeat, was savagely triumphant. So triumphant that it told me, in a single glance, the secret of the horror that gripped the community about me. I did not wait for a second glance!

The door of Antone Sergio's laboratory was a dozen strides distant. I reached it and seized the knob frantically. The barrier was locked. I flung myself against it, time after time. Something splintered, broke. The door clattered inward, I rushed forward; and even as I crossed the threshold I heard a muffled cry from the darkness before me.

A sputtering match burned in my fingers then; burned just long enough for me to discover the gaunt, massive shape of Antone Sergio's mad dynamo. In gloom again I groped toward it, crashing against the heavy table that stood in my path. Wires caught at my feet. I kicked them aside furiously. I could hear the moan of the machine itself—an undercurrent to the vibrant whining that was all about me.

And then I stopped. It was one thing to rush blindly forward with heroic thoughts of destroying the monster which Sergio had created. It was another thing to come in contact with that throbbing metallic giant of evil. The thing was no longer cold and dead; it was fearfully alive!

I am no hero, no man of undaunted courage who will stalk into death for the thrill of it. I had no desire to hurl myself insanely upon this thing and be drawn into its vortex. I hesitated; I fell back. And as I stood there, my stiff fingers mechanically struck another match.

In the glow of that quickly smothered flame I saw something else. It was the shrivelled, distorted figure of Antone Sergio, bound to a table

in the far corner of the room. Blood marred his face, and a livid crimson welt extended across his forehead. He was straining toward me, trying feebly to warn me.

"The switch—Moller! Turn it! Hurry . . ."

The match was dead in my fingers. I scratched another. My hand closed over the black-handled switch that controlled the strength of the infernal beast before me. With a sudden convulsive jerk I wrenched it loose.

What happened then I am not sure. A great sheet of blue flame shot toward me, enveloping me with uncanny quickness. Every separate sound in the room was drowned in a roaring blast of noise. I reeled backward, with both hands pressed against my eyes, and the bitter odor of burning metal in my nostrils. I saw a faint crimson glow well up from the twisted mass of metal before me. I was hot, terribly hot, as though I had suddenly been thrust from absolute cold into a pit of writhing fire.

Somehow, through that burning glare, I reached the man who was in that chamber of fury with me. I wrenched at his ropes until they crumbled in my hands—it was as though they had been eaten through by that first cloud of liquid flame.

I remember dragging him to the door, and hearing his muttered words as his tortured face came close to mine.

"He—tied me here—Moller—and turned it on! God knows—why—he did—it . . ."

Then I was in the corridor outside, on hands and knees, crawling. The voice of the darkness, on every side of me, was a screaming, howling wolf-cry. Sergio was beside me, whimpering. And from far away—from the direction of Vernon's rooms on the other side of the square—came a sound that screeched its way into my very brain. An endless, unfluctuating wall of the most utter agony, born in the deepest depths of hell and loosed from lips that were dying. Shrill and clear it came, murdering everything before it. Murdering my last feeble resistance.

Yet even as I succumbed to it, Sergio's words burned into me. "*He turned it on!*" And I remembered the face of the man who had attacked me at the top of the staircase. The face of Lober—Antone Sergio's assistant.

And as I write this account now, in the security of my own rooms, I still shudder at the bestial expression of that man's features as he fell upon me.

Must there be another chapter to this narrative? After reading it over (it is now three months and four days since my last visit to Antone Sergio's home) I am afraid that I must add a word more.

It was nearly four hours before I regained consciousness on that night of terror. I lay in the corridor of Sergio's house, precisely where I had fallen.

My first thought was of that room of madness. I went to the door. The floor inside was covered with a fine metallic dust; and from the single narrow window in the wall came a ray of warm sunlight. In the corner of the room stood that infernal machine, now merely a twisted, broken pile of metal. And beside it, lying half on the floor and half against the coils of wire, I found Sergio.

I do not know how he returned to that room. I do know this: the love for the instrument he had worked fifty years to perfect was strong enough to overcome physical weakness. He had been dying when I dragged him through that strange glare of light to the safety of the corridor. He was dead when I found him.

I did not remain long. When I reached the street outside, the sun was once again a crimson ball in the evening sky, and that vicious darkness, with its accompanying cold, was a thing of the past.

I hurried to Vernon's rooms, praying fervently that my previous visit there might have been but a nightmare. But I found there, on the floor, huddled shapeless thing with shreds of clothing clinging to it. And all around it, over it, *in* it, lay a film of ill-smelling green slime . . .

An hour later, when I arrived at Pedersen's home, the police were already at the scene. I saw Pedersen's body, and shuddered. And the police were saying, in whispers, that some fiend with terribly powerful hands . . .

I have since discovered one thing more, though. By investigation I found that the notes sent to Pedersen, Vernon, and me were in the handwriting of Sergio's assistant. True, that handwriting was disguised; but it contained certain characteristics which were proof enough in themselves to hang the man.

He was not hanged. He was found later, roaming the streets of a near-by town, and has since been confined to the asylum, on my own recommendation. You ask me why? Because I have discovered that this poor unfortunate fellow was, on his own confession, a devoted dog to young Carmen Veda, who was sent to that same institution some time past. He has told me, with the most honest sorrow, that his reason for

threatening us was because we had taken from him the only thing in the world that he loved.

It was he who bound Sergio to the table. It was he who turned on that terrible machine which opened the gateway of the Death Dimension. It was he who released that malignant elemental from a macabre world and dispatched it on its errand of murder.

He was mad, to be sure; yet he might have been a fiend incarnate. I shudder to think of the nameless horrors which are even now clamoring at that closed Door, seeking admittance—and which he *might* have released, had he so desired.

And so, while I write this, those hours of inferno are a thing of the past. Scientists have already invented their explanations; and some of those inventions are mad enough to bring a smile even to my ignorant lips. The Gateway is closed. That abhorrent darkness with its living spawn is barred—for ever. And unless some meddling fellow chances to find this statement, the truth of that interlude of fear will for ever remain unknown. I have no desire to bring those hours of terror to the fore again. Better, far better, that they remain dead through time eternal.

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WORLD WIDE ADVENTURE

Tales From Cornwall

by David H. Keller, M.D.

(author of *The Abyss*, *Heredity*, etc.)

2 *The Sword and the Eagle*

This is the second of the series of stories DAVID H. KELLER, M.D. wrote around the legends of Cornwall; and while some of this "history of the Hubelaires" is rooted in recognizable myth and legend, much is original with the author. A number of the stories in the series appeared in *WEIRD TALES* and other magazines in the 20s, 30s, and 40s; we see now that there were many more previously unpublished than most of us suspected. And one of Dr. Keller's last projects was to put the Cornwall series in order; so with each chapter, which is a complete tale in itself, we shall run a section of the "Argument from Dates" which will bring the reader up to the time of the current story.

AS HAROLD, LORD OF THE WOLVES IN ARMORICA, strolled among the stone houses which sheltered his family, he watched the children playing merrily while the women worked and the men perfected themselves in the use of the sword, spear and hammer. The Wolves had been at peace for many years but nonetheless were always preparing for a war which they hoped would never come. Mountains surrounded the small valley where the cattle and geese were herded by the older children. Six dragon ships rose and fell with the waves in the little har-

ARGUMENT FROM DATES

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 200 B. C. | Folkes-King Eric rules in Wearfold, Norway. Olaf is Lord of the House of Wolves in Jutland. |
| 190 B. C. | Balder, son of Olaf, is born. |
| 189 B. C. | Thyra, daughter of Eric, is born. |
| 171 B. C. | Balder adventures to Wearfold, kills a giant and marries Thyra. |
| 140 B. C. | Odin, only son of Holga, is born. |
| 100 B. C. | The Wolves are driven from Jutland by the Norsemen. Balder is transmuted into an oak tree. Under the command of Lord Holga the Wolves sail southwest and find a new home in Armorica. |
| 99 B. C. | Harold, son of Odin, is born. |
| 77 B. C. | Edward, son of Harold, is born. |

bor. Some of them were very old and had been used by the Wolves when they fled from Jutland.

Lord Harold was pleased with all he saw; but he was gravely concerned about the peculiar personality of Edward, his only son. Though Edward was a likeable lad, there were moments when his father despaired of his ever becoming worthy of being Lord of the Wolves, for he seemed both unable and unwilling to realize that some day he would rule and, perhaps more important, marry and have a son who in turn would rule after him.

Turning to the forest that stood thick and tall behind the village, Harold found his son seated on a bed of thick club moss, resting against a tree and playing on a harp. For moments Harold stood looking at the young man, who continued playing, seemingly unmindful of his father's presence. Finally, the tune finished, he looked up with a smile. "It is new. How do you like it, Father?" he asked. "When I have perfected it I will teach it to our harper, who will fashion words to go with it; perhaps a song that will remind us of the former greatness of the Wolves."

"It is sweet music," his father replied, "but I have more important matters to talk about. Instead of spending your time playing the harp you should adventure among our neighbors, find a comely maiden and mate with her. Surely there must be one who is worthy of being the bride of the future Lord of the Wolves and the mother of still another Lord to rule when you and I are both dead. Our ancestors, mindful of their responsibility to increase the number of Wolves and provide for an heir who would become ruler, hesitated not to marry the Pictish women when they settled here in Armorica. Your debt to the Wolves is no less than

theirs. You should realize that it is your duty to provide our family with a future Lord."

"You are still a young man, Father, and many years will pass before you journey to Valhalla. I admit the need of there always being a Lord to govern the Wolves, but just now it does not seem to be a matter of immediate importance. Quite some time ago we discussed the advisability of my marriage. I followed your advice, and spent some weeks away from home, entertaining the dark people with my harp and fighting their best warriors, two at a time, disarming them with no blood-letting. That caused much amusement and they marvelled at my ability to use both arms equally well in swordplay. But the maidens liked my music and swordsmanship better than they did me. Besides, I met none who quickened my heart or roused any desire for her. So I returned and continued playing the harp."

Thus ended the argument as always.

The next day a little dark man came to the town of the Wolves and sought a private conference with Lord Harold.

"I bring you news and advice," he said softly. "Some time ago I visited the ancient home of your family in Jutland."

"All I know of that place was told me by my father, Odin," Harold replied. "He was the oldest son of Holga, who was the oldest son of our Lord Balder. My father was only a boy when the family left Jutland but he remembered those last days and often talked of them. He said all the Wolves sorrowed greatly to row away and leave their Lord Balder, sitting before his house with the Thor hammer across his thighs. He must have perished in the blood-letting of the savage Norsemen. What of the home of the Wolves?"

"A few small mounds of moss-grown stones are the only traces of the town. Evidently all the houses were razed and scattered. But where stood the house which, I judge sheltered your Lord there now stands a giant oak. I slept beneath it for one night and the wind-swept branches sent me a very strange dream, for it seemed that the oak tree spoke and told me that it had once been Lord Balder, who was transmuted into a tree when his people fled. And, as his transition was completed, every house fell apart and the stones were scattered as children's drawings in the sands are made smooth and naught remains of their work when the tide flows in. Thus the Norsemen found only the giant oak."

"It may have been a dream," said Harold, "but even so it is comforting to hear that Balder suffered naught at the hands of the raiders. He

commanded us to flee so the Wolves would be saved from destruction. Though we have been happy here and are proud of our little town, we have not greatly increased since leaving Jutland. But tell me more of Lord Balder. If he was changed to an oak his wish to die fighting was unfulfilled."

The dark man put fingertip to fingertip and stared at the ground. "The dream was all confused," he said, "for none lived to tell what actually happened. One can but imagine the wrath of the thwarted Norsemen. There are no branches of the oak, old as it must be, lying on the ground, but near its base a large axe lies embedded. It must have been struck in a very long time ago, for the deep wound is healed and the huge blade nearly overgrown."

"With the help of time and tides the sands have almost completely buried the wrecks of many dragon ships, among which lie a large number of bleached bones. Near one crushed skull I found the Thor hammer, which I recognized at once, for it is the only one of its kind in all the world. So Lord Balder must have had his desire to kill at least one man, though how the others died or all the ships were wrecked in the harbor is a mystery none may solve. I brought the hammer with me, as it is a treasure. It is a weighty weapon which I could hardly lift, but here it is."

He handed it to Lord Harold, who examined it carefully.

"This must indeed be the hammer of Balder, for it is as the singer of songs tells of it. For many years our harpers have sung of this weapon. I will hang it over my fireplace, though I doubt if any Wolf, now or in times to come, will ever be able to use it in battle.

"When we left our old home my grandfather brought a long spear with him. One of our songs relates that it once belonged to a mighty giant killed by Balder when he won his bride. Now we have two weapons to help us remember our wonderful ancestor, the Thor hammer and the spear."

"Now for the real purpose of my visit," the little man continued; "I wish to talk with you about your son Edward. I have questioned many about him since coming to your country and all agree that he is a very unusual man; more interested in playing the harp than toying with a bride."

"That is true and causes me deep concern. In times past our men have taken their women with right hand or left; he uses both hands equally well but says he cannot find a woman to please him."

"So I've heard. Many told me of his swordplay with both hands. I

have decided to help him. Summon him to us and we will determine what he thinks of my present and my advice."

Harold called for his son. "Edward," he said, "this man is very wise and is an old friend of our family. He brings you a present."

As they exchanged greetings the little dark man noted that Edward was not a tall man but broad of shoulders and stood firm and erect like all the Wolves. Unlike his father, who was blonde and blue-eyed, he was black-haired and brown of eye with swart skin, the heritage of his Pictish mother.

Then the little man handed Edward a sword, saying, "This sword was made in Gobi by a clever smith. When the blade was cherry-hot he tempered it by plunging it into dragon's blood. He graved on it a legend which you cannot read, but it says, 'I cut but never break'. The two handles are fashioned from the horns of unicorns. You probably know the old superstition, that if a virgin touches a unicorn she is safe from all men. It was an odd conceit to place such handles on such a blade."

Lord Harold said, "Give me the sword." He held it carefully and felt the cutting edges. "This is the most peculiar sword I ever saw. I admit the double edges are sharp; and it was well tempered by that smith in Gobi, which place I never heard of. Also this is the first time I ever talked to one who know of dragons and unicorns, but this is not strange, for the Wolves are not wanderers. What makes me marvel is that there is a handle at each end. I cannot see how a man could fight with such a weapon. Perhaps my son will be able to solve this mystery," and he passed the sword to his son.

The young man took the sword in both hands. Then, holding it with his right hand, he pulled a long hair from his dark locks and very gently brought it first against one blade and then the other. The cut hairs fell to the ground.

"It is a sharp sword," he said. "I thank the giver, though I am puzzled as to why he gave it to me or how he knew I am adept in use of both hands. In swordplay I could not use a shield, as I must hold the sword with both hands. My enemy would come at me with a down-striking blow while I would simply hold this sword high in the air over my head. His sword would strike my weapon and be cut in two. At least it would if the words graved on it are true. He would then be at my mercy. That is the only way I know to use such an unusual sword in either play or combat."

"Your son has the right idea," the little man remarked to Lord Harold. "Now for the advice. He should journey directly east. At the beginning of

the fifth day of his wandering he will find that which will both please and interest him. He will take with him no other weapon save the sword, no armor, and only sufficient food for the five days of going and the five days of returning."

"Who rules the Wolves, Edward?" asked Harold.

"You are their Lord, Sire."

"And when I command what do they do?"

"They obey."

"Then this is my command. Tomorrow leave home and in every way follow the advice of this rare friend. I trust you will return safely, for if evil befalls you then the ruling line of our family is broken, for you have neither wife nor son to carry on."

Edward took the sword and, bowing low, left the two men.

"Nothing will happen to him," said the little dark man. "I have always cared for the Wolves. In a manner of speaking they are my kinfolk, for Lord Balder married one of my daughters."

"How can that be?" asked the puzzled Lord. "He has been dead—or, as you said, changed to an oak tree—for many, many years."

"You may be right. Perhaps I only think so. Often I make statements because I think them true without being able to explain why. But I am confident your son will have a most unusual adventure and return safely. When he comes back, no matter what he says or does, think kindly of him, for everything a Wolf does is directed by the gods and they are wise. 'Tis best to obey them no matter where it leads. Perhaps I am a god. Who knows?" and he vanished, leaving Lord Harold more confused than ever.

For four days Edward traveled eastward and not once did he meet a man. On the morning of the fifth day he came to a meadow, the grass grown lush, surrounded by tall pines. Here sat a man in a golden chair, on the arm of which perched an eagle who, seeing Edward, flapped her wings and cried, "Hubelair! Hubelair!" or at least so it sounded to the young man. She tried to fly toward him but was prevented by a long gold chain which bound her to the chair.

The seated man looked keenly at Edward. Though he remained silent it seemed that he asked a question, which the young Wolf understood and answered.

"For four days I have walked through the dark forest, not knowing why or what I sought. But now I know. Give me the eagle!"

The man laughed. "You have the impudence and impetuosity of

youth. For years I have sat in this chair brooding, while this bird has sat beside me saying only one word in an unknown tongue which I cannot understand, and thus it makes no sense whatever, but only interferes with my brooding. If you can excel me in sword-play you may have the eagle, but if I win the combat I will tie you to the other arm of the chair and, with you on one side and the eagle on the other, I will continue my brooding."

"Fair enough," cried Edward, "and now to the sword!"

Rising from his chair the man drew his long sword from its leather sheath and advanced threateningly upon Edward, who simply raised his sword in air, arm high. The man gave a mighty cut downward and, as his sword met the blade forged in Gobi, it was cut through as though it were a piece of rotten wood; but so mighty was the blow that the severed tip plunged downward and buried itself in the soft sod.

"Now this is magic against which no man prevail!" cried the man. "I can fight against man, but no against the gods. I will unloose the chain and give you the bird; but keep her bound, for, once released, she will fly away and then neither of us will have her."

"No. Take the chain off her leg. I will not keep her a prisoner. Unless she stays with me willingly she stays not at all."

The released eagle flew to Edward at once. Perching on his shoulder she flapped her wings and cried, "Hubelaire! Hubelaire!" or at least so it sounded to the young man.

"Now go you back to the place of your coming," cried the man as he sat down in his chair, "and leave me to my brooding, which I can now do without being constantly disturbed by the raucous cries of this eagle. I have so many important things to brood over that I cannot offer you hospitality. Even if I live to old age I will not have time to sufficiently worry over all the problems which confront me."

"Life is short and a man is young only once," Edward answered. "Unless you had frequent interruptions from unusual visitors, you must have spent many precious years trying to solve your problems. You are either a wise man or a fool."

"Twenty years ago," the man replied, "I climbed a mighty crag and took this eagle, then only a fledgling, from her nest. From that day I have seldom left this chair and during that time you have been my only visitor. Were I wise, I would find an answer to all my questionings; if a fool, I would not spend a second trying to change human destiny. Being neither, I find there is naught else to do but continue my meditations."

For four days Edward walked toward the setting sun and on the fifth came to his home. During this time the eagle often flew into the blue sky until she was but a mere speck, but always she returned to her perch on his shoulder.

"I am glad you have returned from this adventure," Lord Harold greeted his son. "Tell me what befell you and how you come by that fierce eagle which sits so haughtily on your shoulder."

As Edward related all the happenings his father marveled greatly.

"What will you do with the bird? And why did you bring an eagle instead of a woman?" he asked, dissatisfaction in his voice.

"I will keep the window of my house always open so she may come and go as she will; for no one, certainly not a mere man, may tell so proud a bird what she may or may not do. I did not bring a woman because I saw none and, as I told you, only the one man from whom I took the eagle after the swordplay."

Then Edward took the sword and bound the blade with leather and soft velvet and swung it by the two hafts from the lower posts of his bed. There the eagle perched and preened her feathers, what time she was not flying in the blue sky hunting food. And all the young maidens wondered what manner of man Edward was to keep a bird in his bedchamber rather than a woman.

One day the eagle brought in small branches of pine, twigs of spruce and tender ends of the yew and built a nest in one corner of the room, wherein she laid a very large egg. On this she sat for many days, never leaving it, during which time Edward fed her with joints of chicken and rabbit. Then one day she left her nest and flew to her sword-perch crying proudly, "Hubelaire! Hubelaire!" Edward peered into the nest and saw the broken shell and, to his astonishment, a sturdy baby boy.

"Now what to do?" he asked himself. "This proud eagle laid an egg and hatched a boy child. There is no doubt that this is a most unusual event in her life and mine; but instead of wondering how it happened, 'twould serve better to think of the child, for it needs to be fed and cared for."

The eagle flew down from the perch and, standing on the floor, changed into a woman of marvelous beauty with bronze-colored hair and a long robe of deep blue.

"You need not worry about that, my so sweet Edward," she said, "for this is our child and I will care for him as any mother would," and she opened her gown and bared her breast, and the little one suckled and fell asleep.

Full of dazed wonderment Edward sped to his father's house. "Some time ago," he said, trying to control his excitement, "you urged me to adventure into faraway lands and find me a wife who would bear a man-child to be future Lord to the Wolves. Come with me to my house and see for yourself how well I have followed your advice. For, were I tell you now, you would not believe me."

Without replying, Lord Harold rose and went with him. There, in Edward's house, he saw the lovely woman holding the sleeping baby in her arms.

"This is my wife, Father, and the baby she holds so proudly is a boy; though I know little of such younglings, it seems strong and hearty and no doubt will grow to be a mighty man."

All this puzzled Lord Harold. "I don't know how you did it, my dear boy," he said. "How could you keep a woman all this while without anyone's knowing it? And where is the eagle?"

The woman smiled as she looked at the grandfather, father and son and then she replied for Edward. "The eagle has flown away and will never more return, but I can repeat her cry of 'Hubelairé! Hubelairé!' and that shall be the name of all who descend from this boy; no longer Wolves, but Hubelaires. As soon as may be I will clean away the nest and Edward will unwrap the sword and hang it over the fireplace, for we will have use for neither perch nor nest in the future. Bird, or woman, I am proud and clean and wish to live in a house that is neat and orderly. And my son shall be called Cecil."

Some months later the little dark stranger appeared unannounced in the main room of Lord Harold's house.

"How fares it, my dear sib?" he asked.

"So you have come again," Harold replied. "Hapstance you know what happened when my son took your advice? He returned with an eagle, a very unusual bird who kept repeating a single word. In some way, months later, he found a wife and a son. I believe he was as surprised as all the family. Did you, in some way, work a powerful magic to give me a grandchild?"

"That may be. I will not say 'Yea' and I cannot say 'Nay'. But I have come for far more serious business than explaining how an eagle could lay an egg, hatch out a baby, and then suddenly become a very lovely woman. Your family must leave Armorica, which has served as a safe and pleasant home for so many years, and find a new lodgement in the lands across the sea."

"Why must that be? We have no enemies to make war upon us."

"Far to the east there is a mighty city called Rome," the little man explained. "The rulers are never satisfied but are always foraying into far lands to kill, conquer, and hold all folk in slavery. At present their army, under a Lord called Caesar, is advancing through Gaul. They cut a path through the dark forests and build roads. When they come to a river they bridge it with logs and cross dry-shod. Their soldiers are gathered in companies called legions and, so far, even the mightiest of the Gauls have been unable to withstand them. Some day they will reach your land, kill the men, make slaves of the women, and rear the young boys to become soldiers in their legions. That must not happen to the Wolves. You have some dragon ships; build more at once and take all your folk, cattle, geese and grain with you. The wind and tides will carry you to a land called Cornwall, where you will find a place of refuge."

"These are sorry words and perhaps poor advice," growled Lord Harold.

"You have a right to your opinion but the Wolves—or Hubelaitres, as Edward's wife wants them called in the future—must never die. No matter what happens they must live on and on, for to me it seems impossible that anything as fine as the family I helped create should pass into nothingness. So, while time remains, prepare to flee. It would be brave to fight and die, but far wiser to flee and live."

For several days Lord Harold weighed the advice and discussed it with the older men of the Wolves. Finally he gave the order to build more boats. Now everyone was busy and all the women and even the little children did what they could to prepare for the sailing. At last they left Armorica and sailed for many days, wind-driven, till they reached the coast of a new land, where they beached their boats and set free the cattle so they could eat; all made merry, because the new land seemed a place of certain refuge.

The day after landing, Lord Harold, his son Edward and a few of the older Wolves explored the country, desiring to find a proper place to build a new town. In a few hours they came to a very large house, the like of which they had never seen; walls fifty feet high with no opening save a small gate connecting with a drawbridge that spanned a channel of water surrounding the high walls. On one side a watchtower rose high above the lofty wall.

The little dark man stood on the drawbridge awaiting them.

"Welcome to your new home, Lord Harold," he cried, "and greetings

to you, my good Edward. How goes it with your eagle wife and fine boy? How do you like your new home?"

"I never saw anything like it," Lord Harold replied. "How is it built and what use can be made of it?"

"It is a castle. In years to come it will be called the Castle of the Hubelaires, if Edward's wife has her way, and I am certain she will, because she is a very clever woman. In it are many rooms, enough to house all the family at one time. The banquet hall is large enough that all may sit at one long table and eat. Inside is a spring of never-failing water, storage bins for grain and hay, stalls for horses and cattle. Once your family, stock and belongings are in this castle and the drawbridge raised, naught can harm you. Before this you lived in little houses, pleasant enough but impossible to defend. New times, increasing dangers, need different solutions. So I brought you to Cornwall, where I knew this castle waited, for I want your family, Wolves or Hubelaires, to live on and on."

One of the warriors, who was a stonemason, inspected the walls. Turning he said to Lord Harold: "It would have taken hundreds of men many years to build those high walls, my Lord, yet the cutting on the stones seems fresh and the mortar between them is still soft in places."

Harold turned to ask the dark man about it, but he was nowhere to be seen.



Inquisitions

HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION

by Alexi Panshin

Advent: Publishers, Inc., PO Box 9228, Chicago, Illinois 60690; 198 pp, including index, *plus* Introduction by James Blish; \$6.00.

It's encouraging to see a new and young face among the graying beards of that minority of science fiction critics which have consistently insisted that science fiction ought to be judged by the same standards, when excellence is to be assessed, as any other sort of fiction. Alexi Panshin entered the ranks of professional authors in 1960, and has recently become a full-time writer; he has therefore not only some solid background in the sort of trial that any author has to undergo, in order to produce stories at all, but also at least an idea of what compromises an author must make if he is going to sell most of what he writes—meaning that the commercial writer cannot have his own way all the time, even under the best of conditions; whereas the dedicated amateur, not dependent upon writing for a living, can refuse to make any compromises at all. And if he is also an amateur publisher, he can be *sure* that anything he writes will be published exactly as he wrote it.

This book is neither a panegyric nor an expose; it will not mollify either the reader who believes that Heinlein Can Do No Wrong, or the reader who contends that Heinlein Has Done Nothing Right, or entirely satisfy the larger Heinlein Was Fine

Until . . . contingent. What we have here is an assessment, based on rigorous criteria which the author outlines clearly, then presents not just his judgments as to whether Heinlein is good, or indifferent (and when) in this respect, but the reasons for this judgment, citing chapter and verse. The reader, as with the case in any worthwhile criticism, is given full opportunity to discover whether (a) Panshin is correctly reporting what is there on the author's printed page for anyone to see (b) he—the reader—agrees with the assessments the critic derives from his premises and the evidence cited. And the worth of such a book of criticism does *not* depend upon whether you agree; it depends upon the opportunities it offers you to see things about an author and his work that you did not notice before, and to see *why* you accept or reject the critic's evaluation.

I do not know of any other living, long producing science fiction author who is more worthy of such an assessment-in-depth as Robert A. Heinlein; and one of the merits of Panshin's achievement, for me, is that he has increased my appreciation of his subject matter even where I disagree with him.

There is no reason why you, or anyone else, *must* accept the Knight-Blish-Panshin, etc., standards of criticism for science fiction. But *if* you feel that science fiction is, or ought to be considered as, literature worthy of critical respect, *then* these standards of assessment follow logically; and *then* *Heinlein in Dimension* is decidedly a book for you. RAWL

A Brooding Grim Tale of Gathering Horror in Arkham. Not to be Read After Dark. A Tale That Will Give You Gooseflesh.

The Horror Out Of Lovecraft

by Donald A. Wollheim

(author of Bones, Doorslammer, etc.)

What dread horror lurked in the room of Eliphas Snodgrass? What was the unspeakable secret revealed in the awful pages of the accursed NECRONOMICON? Where did the smell come from that hung over the ancient Crombleigh house?

"Oh my Gawd, my Gawd," the voice choked out. It's a-go'n agin, an' this time by day! It's aout—it's aout an' a-movin' this very minute, an' only the Lord knows when it'll be on us all!"

— H. P. LOVECRAFT

I DO NOT KNOW what strange thing came over me when I determined on my investigation of the mysterious doings of Eliphas Snodgrass that winter in '39. There are things that it is better no man know, and there are mysteries that should remain forever hidden from mortal knowledge. The whereabouts of Eliphas Snodgrass during the

Pastiches and burlesques of H. P. Lovecraft are nothing new but this is the first one I read which was a good imitation of HPL and a gentle, loving spoof, rather than a series of wisecracks or a *serious* attempt to duplicate the master. The special blurbs are part of the story and were written by the author, not the editor.

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM corresponded with Lovecraft for many years, and published a number of sections to the *Fungi From Yuggoth* in his well-printed fan magazine, *THE PHANTAGRAPH* in 1936 and years following. Wollheim's first professional appearance was with *The Man From Ariel*, in the January 1934 issue of *WONDER STORIES*; he was editor of the first magazine which was a true combination of science fiction and weird fiction; the first half of the publication was titled *STIRRING SCIENCE FICTION* and the second half, with independent editorial matter, departments, etc., was titled *STIRRING FANTASY FICTION*. A low budget publication, this title, along with a companion magazine, *COSMIC STORIES* (all science fiction) offered opportunities to a number of new authors to write in their own way and get it published, even if the payment was nothing to cheer about. A number of the better short stories of C. M. Kornbluth appeared in these two short-lived titles, as did those of others who became better known later, including DAW himself and your editor.

Although a professional editor since 1940, Wollheim has found time to write a number of science fiction novels, including the popular "Mike Mars" series, has edited anthologies, and has never lost interest in science fiction and fantasy fandom. His many contributions thereto were officially recognized last year when he was selected as Guest of Honor for the 1968 Lunacon—the annual Metropolitan Area convention sponsored by New York's Lunarian Society. He is still supervisor of Ace Books' science fiction line, which he inaugurated early in the '50s.

autumn of '39, and the ensuing winter, are among these things. Would that I had had the stamina to restrain my curiosity.

I first heard of Eliphas Snodgrass when I was visiting my aunt Eulalia Barker, at her home in East Arkham, in the back districts of Massachusetts. A forgotten terrain, dark and somber, it was a region amongst the oldest in America, not only in the origin of its white settlers (it was settled by several boatloads of surly bondsmen brought over on the packet *Nancy B.* in 1647, commanded by the time-befogged Captain Hugh Quinge, about whom little is known save that it is believed that he was part Hindoo and that he married an Irish girl from Cork under mysterious circumstances) but in other *elder* traditions. My maiden-aunt Eulalia was a pleasant enough spinster—she was related to me on my

mother's side, mother being a Barker from Bowser, a little, scarce-known fishing town.

Eulalia (she had moved from Bowser suddenly, many years ago, under circumstances which were never made clear) had struck up a passing acquaintance with the Snodgrass family, who occupied the sedate old Crombleigh mansion on the other side of West Arkham. How she happened to meet Mrs. Snodgrass, she was seemingly reticent to discuss.

Nonetheless, I had been staying at her house while pursuing my studies in the famous library at Miskatonic University, located in Arkham, but a scant three weeks before she mentioned Eliphas Snodgrass. She spoke of him to me in a troubled tone; she seemed reluctant to do so, but confessed that Eliphas' mother (who must have had Asistic blood several generations back) had asked her to communicate to me her worries. As I was known to them for my scholarly research in the realm of the ancient mythologies, she knew me as a scholar. It seemed that Eliphas Snodgrass had been acting oddly. This was not new, as I learned later; it was only that his *oddness* had taken a curiously disturbing turn.

Eliphas Snodgrass, as I learned from my aunt and from other subsequent investigations, was a young man of about 27—tall, thin, gaunt, rather stark of countenance, vaguely swarthy (probably an inheritance from his father, Hezekiah Snodgrass, who was reputed to have African blood on his mother's side, six generations removed) and was given to long spells of brooding. At other times, he would be normal and almost cheerful (as much so as any other Arkham youth) but there were periods when, for weeks at a stretch, he would lock himself away in his chambers and remain grimly quiet. Occasionally strange noises could be heard issuing from his rooms—weird singing and odd conversations. Once in a while, the house would be thrown into a paroxysm of terror by unearthly screeches and a howling that would usually be cut off short in a manner dreadful to contemplate. When queried as to the nature of these noises, Eliphas would turn coldly, and, fixing the inquirer with a chilly stare, mumble something about trouble with his radio.

NATURALLY, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND how grimly disturbing these things were. And, since I owed my aunt Eulalia a debt which I dare not explain here, I felt it incumbent upon me to make a brief inquiry into Eliphas' doings. I secured entry to the Snodgrass mansion by means of my aunt, who invited me to accompany her on a social call.

I had not set foot in the house one minute before I sensed the strange,

brooding aspect of it. There seemed a closeness in the air, a feeling of tense expectancy as if something, I know not what, were waiting—waiting for a moment to strike. A curious smell seemed to waft into my nostrils—an odd stench as of something musty and long dead. I felt troubled.

Eliphas came in shortly after I had arrived. He had been out somewhere—he did not vouchsafe where—and it seemed to me that his shoes were curiously dirtied, as if he had been digging deep into the dusty soil; his hair was curiously disarranged. He spoke to me civilly enough and was sharply interested when he heard that I was studying at Mis-katonic University. He asked me animatedly whether or not I had heard of the famous copy of the *Necronomicon* by the mad Arab, Abdul Al-hazred, which is one of the most prized possessions of the University. I was forced to reply in the negative, at which he seemed oddly displeased. For a moment, I thought he was going to leave abruptly, but then he checked himself, made an odd motion in the air with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and started discussing the singular weather we had been having.

It had started by being an unusually hot summer, but a few days ago the weather had changed suddenly to a curious dry chill. At night a wind would arise which seemed to sweep down from the hills beyond Arkham, bearing with it an odd fishy stench. Most of the oldtimers remarked on its oddness, and one or two compared it to the strange wind of the Dark Day of 1875, about which they failed to elucidate.

I saw Eliphas Snodgrass several times more that summer, and each time he seemed more preoccupied and strange than before. At one time he cornered me and begged me to try to borrow the volume of Al-hazred from the library for him. He had been refused access to it by the librarian, a most learned man who evidently made it a practice to refuse consultation with that book, and others of similar ilk, to persons of a certain nervous type.

I well remember the night of September 10th. It had started out as a typical hot day of late summer; toward evening it grew chill, and, as the sun set, a high wind sprang up. Dark clouds seemed to arise out of nowhere and very shortly a gale was blowing down from the hills and lightning was crackling far in the distance.

Along about twelve o'clock, a curious lull occurred which lasted for about ten minutes. I recall it well for at that moment a stench of mustiness seeped into the town, drenching every house and person. I had been reading late and I stopped as the smell assailed me, and realization

that the storm had ceased came to me. I stepped to the window, pulled up the shades, and stared out.

Outside, the sky was a dead black. There was a pregnant stillness in the air, and a thin, miasmatic mist hung all about. Then like a bolt from the blue there came a terrific clap of thunder and with it a startling *green* flash of lightning which seemed to strike somewhere in Arkham and linger. I remember being amazed at the fact that I had heard the thunder *before* seeing the lightning, rather than after.

Immediately after this remarkable phenomenon, the storm broke out in renewed fury and continued several more hours.

I WAS AWAKENED in the morning by the insistent ringing of the telephone. My aunt, who answered it, knocked on the door shortly after and bade me dress. It seemed that it was the Crombleigh house that had been the resting point of the odd lightning. Nothing was damaged, but Eliphas Snodgrass was missing.

I rushed over. As I neared the house, I could sense the smell, and upon crossing the threshold, I was virtually bowled over by the odor of dead and decaying fish which permeated the place. The stench had come when the lightning struck, Mrs. Snodgrass told me, and they were trying desperately to air it out. It had been much worse than it was now.

Overcoming my repugnance, I went in and climbed the steps to Eliphas' room. It was in dreadful disorder, as if someone had left hurriedly. I was told that a bag had been packed and was missing. Eliphas' bed had not been slept in; the room was strewn with books, manuscripts, papers, diaries, and curious old relics.

During the next days, while elsewhere state police and federal authorities were making a futile search for young Snodgrass, I went over the items I had found in his room. I shudder at the terrible notes and the things they implied.

Primarily, I found a notebook, the sort children use for copying lessons, in which I seemed to sense a series of clues. Evidently Snodgrass kept memoranda in it. There was a yellowed newspaper clipping from some San Francisco paper, which said in part: —

FREIGHTER IN PORT WITH STRANGE TALE

The *Kungshavn* arrives with story
of Boiling Sea and Sinking Islands.

San Francisco: The Swedish freighter *Kungshavn* arrived in port today with its crew telling a strange story of a weird storm at sea, and almost incredible manifestations. Most of the crew were reluctant to speak of it, but reporters drew out a fantastic tale of a sudden storm which hit the ship two days out of New Guinea, of a terrible waterspout that pursued the ship for five hours in the semi-darkness of the storm, and of an island that seemed to sink into the water before their very eyes, and of sailing through a sea of boiling, bubbling water for two solid hours. Third Mate Swenson, who seemed most deeply overcome by the experience, kept praying and mumbling of a terrible demon or sea-monster whom he called Kichulu or Kithuhu.

The clipping went on for several more paragraphs, giving mainly further details on the above.

Following this was another clipping from the same paper, but dated several days after. This reported the sudden death of one Olaf Swenson, a member of the crew of the *Kungshavn*, who was found in a back alley of San Francisco *with his face chewed off*.

Beside this clipping, the oddly crabbed handwriting of Eliphas Snodgrass read: "Kichulu— does he mean Cthulhu?"

This meant nothing to me at the time. Oh, would that it had! Perhaps I still might have saved Eliphas.

Then there was a note in Eliphas' handwriting:—

"Tuesday must say the Dho chant and widdershin six times. Hastur is ascendant. Dagon recumbent? Must investigate. See Lovecraft on the proper incantation for Yog-Sotod. Pygnont says he has copy of *Eibon* for me; must write to him to send it by special messenger. I feel that the time is close. I *must* consult Alhazred— must find a way to obtain the volume. It is all in the old Arab's book; he bungled; I must not. So little time. The Day of Blackness is approaching. I must be ready. Lloigor protect me."

After this, there was a sheaf of pages crammed with what looked like chemical and astrological configurations.

I FELT VERY DISTURBED after reading the above. It was so out of the ordinary. I have but one thing more to mention from that

investigation. On the ceiling of Eliphas' room was a curious, wide wet mark. I knew that the roof leaked, but still it was sinister.

Gradually the city settled back to normal. Normal! When I think now what a horror was amongst us, I shudder that we can say such things as back to normal. The stench in the Snodgrass home gradually abated.

I went back about my studies and soon had almost forgotten Eliphas. It was not until the early winter that the matter came up again. At that time, Mrs. Snodgrass called to say that she had heard footsteps in the dead of night in Eliphas' room, and thought she had heard conversations; yet, when she knocked, there was no one there.

I returned with Mrs. Snodgrass to the Crombleigh mansion and re-entered Eliphas' chamber. She had placed the room in order, carefully filing the papers and objects. I thought nothing was out of place until I chanced to glance up at the ceiling. There were wet footprints against the white kalsomine of the ceiling—footprints leading across from the top of the door to where the large closet opened!

I went at once to the closet; at first glance nothing was wrong. Then I noticed a bit of paper lying on the floor. I picked it up. On it was written one word in a hand unmistakably that of the missing student.

One word—"Alhazred"!

As soon as I was free, I went to Miskatonic University and secured permission to peruse that damnable volume by Abdul Alhazred. Would that I had not! Would that I had forgotten the whole affair!

Never will I forget the terrible knowledge that entered my brain during those hours when I sat reading the horror-filled pages of that loathsome book. The demoniac abnormalities that assailed my mind with indisputable truth will forever unshake my faith in the world. The book should be destroyed; it is the encyclopedia of madness. All that afternoon I read those madness-filled pages and it was well into the night before I came across the passage which answered my riddle. I will not say what it was for I dare not. Yet I started back in dread; what I saw there was horror manifold. And I knew that I must act at once, that very night, or all would be lost. Perhaps all was lost already. I rushed out of the library into the darkness of the night.

A STRANGE SNOW was falling, a curious flickering snow that fell like phantoms in the darkness. Through it I ran across block after endless block of ancient houses to the Snodgrass mansion. As I came down the street, I thought I saw a flicker of green outlined against the roof. I redoubled my pace and dashing up their porch, hammered

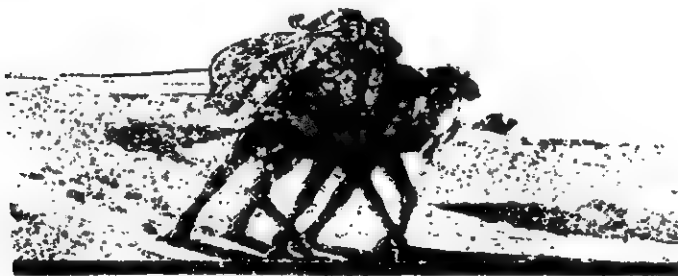
upon the door. It was near twelve and it took some time before the family let me in. Hastily I said I had to make another search of Eliphas' room and they let me pass. I dashed up the stairs and threw open the door of his chamber. It was dark and I flicked on the light.

Shall I ever forget the terrible thing I saw there? The horror, the dread, the madness seemed too much for the human mind to bear. I flicked the light off at once, and, closing the door, fled screaming out into the street. Well it was that a raging fire broke out immediately afterward and burned that accursed house to the ground. Well—for such a damnable thing must not be, must never be on this world.

If man but knew the screaming madness that lurks in the bowels of the land and the depths of the ocean, if he but caught one glimpse of the things that await in the vast empty depths of the hideous cosmos! If he knew the secret significance of the flickering of the stars! If the discovery of Pluto had struck him as the omen it was!

If man knew, I think that knowledge would burn out the brains of every man, woman, and child on the face of Earth. Such things must never be known. Such unspeakable, unfathomable evil must never be allowed to seep into the mentalities of men lest all go up in chaos and madness.

How am I to say what I saw in the room of that cursed house? *As I opened the door, there on the bedspread, revealed by the sudden flash of the electric light, lay the still quivering big toe of Eliphas Snodgrass!*



The Last Work Of Pietro Of Apono

by Steffan B. Aletti

(author of *The Eye of Horus*, *The Castle in the Window*)

STEFFAN B. ALETTI has been justly hailed by the majority of you, the readers, as a most promising "discovery" for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. He also has a quality which all authors need, but which is rare to find in a new writer: patience. Since this magazine appears only every other month, and the bulk of its content consists of stories which you have urged us to reprint; new manuscripts, while always welcome, must be fitted in on an "if, as, and when" basis. This is the last of three stories which we accepted quite a long time ago, but we hope that they will be only the first of a long series.

I ARRIVED LAST SPRING, full of hope for the early and triumphant completion of my doctorate in Italian Renaissance studies. Padua, Perugia, Ravenna, Firenze! All names that practically shivered me with delight. Here I was, in the very seat of the Renaissance, that bright green and gold arousing of mankind from his long, shaggy medieval sleep. It was through these sumptuous hills that Petrarch wander-

ed, singing of Laura, and Dante of Beatrice. It was here that Landini lent his name to that cadence that would color music until the baroque, and it was under these bright Tuscan trees and skies that Leonardo and Michelangelo both strove to make men into angels.

But my quarry was more elusive than these giants; I was seeking a man who had been swallowed up in one of those tragic, dark pockets that even the Renaissance contained. Pietro, or Peter, of Apono had been born in 1250 in, logically, Apono, a little hamlet not far from Padua. He had been a great man; a philosopher, writer, poet, mathematician, and astrologer. Following the practice of his time, he turned these various skills over to the study of medicine, and his fame as a physician was renowned even as far as the great walled city of Paris, where his cures had been nothing short of miraculous. When he returned to Italy a famous man, he got into a silly squabble with a neighbor, over the use of a spring on the man's property. The man, apparently an ill-tempered lout, finally forbade Pietro to use the spring, and within a few days, the well mysteriously dried up. It was then rumored about the neighborhood that old Pietro was a sorcerer, and that it was he who, out of spite, caused the well to dry.

From this germ of nonsense, a great host of stories and accusations spread and fell upon Pietro's head; he was finally brought to the attention of the Inquisition.

The inquisitors took hold of the kindly old man and burned his flesh, broke his bones, and stretched him out of shape; still, Pietro would not admit to being driven by demons, or in consort with the devil himself. But his body was not as strong as his will, and the old man died painfully, yet free in spirit.

Of course the inquisitors were furious at being cheated out of an execution, so, only a few days after the luckless Pietro had been buried, a group of pious priests were sent to exhume his body and burn it in the public square. To their horror, the body had disappeared—risen it was assumed—and the inquisitors fled back to Padua with a tale that soon dissolved into legend.

Needless to say, the explanation was much less cosmic than that. One of Pietro's friends and benefactors, one Girolamo da Padova, had the body exhumed and re-interred in his own crypt, to save his old friend's spirit from the indignities that the Inquisition had intended. I alone of living men knew this, for I had found a collection of old letters, including one that Girolamo had sent a trusted friend to explain the "resurrection". In the letter Girolamo states that he took all of Pietro's

books for himself, except the one that he had been translating at the time of his arrest. He adds:

"It was in Maestro Pietro's province to bring all things to light, no matter how loathsome. He believed that the light of reason would make everything beautiful and holy, but I tell thee, my good Ludovico, this book from Paris is the devil's work. Cursed from remotest antiquity, this parchment hath caused the ruin of all who deal with it, and, as thou seest, Pietro himself was the last of their line. He tried, as was his wont, to turn the cursed thing to the good, to use its blasphemies for healing and helping, but its grotesque blood rites and hymns to desecration shocked even good Pietro. He had decided that the work was too blasphemous and too degrading to ever be turned towards good, and he was resolved to destroy it and his own partial translation. But the Holy Inquisition caught him before he could accomplish this.

"Fortunately, he had hidden both behind one of the books in his cabinet before the inquisition came through the door. I have taken both; his translation is now buried with him in my own family's crypt in the Church of San Giuseppe, and the parchment itself, unfit for holy ground, hath been buried outside the city walls. I pray that my own handling of it hath not endangered mine own soul."

So I, a lowly student, was about to find the bones and last work of the legendary Pietro of Apono.

II

THE BUSINESS OF THE BOOK had excited me. What had it been? Could it have been one of the early latin translations of the *Necronomicon*? Or possibly the now fabled Delancré translation of the horrid *Mnemabic Fragments*? Or was it some heretofore uncovered masterpiece of ancient or gothic imagination? I immediately envisioned my doctoral thesis as an edition of this newly discovered work; its first edition in 700 years.

Girolamo's family had died out in the plague that sent Boccaccio fleeing to the hills of Florence to give us the *Decameron*. Therefore, the crypt in the cellar of the San Giuseppe church was untended, and of only minor archaeological interest. My request, consequently, to spend the night

studying the badly worn monuments and inscriptions was granted by the monks without undue trouble.

Alone, finally, and not a little nervous at being surrounded by the long dead, I began to poke my way about the ruins of the vaults. The cement binding the slabs to the coffins themselves had long since crumbled, so lifting off the covers was simply a matter of judicious use of a crow-bar and a strong back.

Relative after relative, I studied—Antonello, Giorgio, Tonio, Lucia, etc. All I encountered in these beautifully decorated marble coffins was moulded skulls and various bones; mostly the bones no longer adhered to each other, so that all semblance of a body or human form was lost. They were just piles of bones and mounds of shredded, wormy velvet and silk. For some reason, I'm glad to say, it had not occurred to me that I was desecrating the dead. Scholars are well known to get carried away by their work, and so with me that night. I am not a particularly brave man, and I would not even walk alone through a graveyard at night without qualms; but that fearful night I was alone, because I did not want to have to share my discovery with anyone. There I was, marauding through a crypt at night, rummaging through bones and cloth, without any thought other than honest, if selfish, scholarship.

It must have been that black hour prior to dawn, that I opened the tomb next to Girolamo's. In it lay a surprisingly well preserved body, but it lay horribly twisted and broken, and on its legs and arms were the remnants of linen bandages. The skull lay at an odd angle from the body, and its lipless and crag-toothed mouth was open wide in what still, after 700 years, looked like a howl of pain. My fortitude was gone, in an instant. Here, unquestionably, was Pietro, still bearing traces of the horror of the Inquisition. I sickened and began to gasp for air as the foetid odor lept at me from the long shut tomb. I fled to the stairway and sped up it in an instant.

The church itself now seemed populated by millions of rustling, whispering things that were lent shape by my now rampant imagination. I imagined it to be visited by the shade of every lost man, woman and child who had ever sat within its walls. Terrified, I fell to my knees at the thought and, before I lost consciousness, I thought I saw coming up the dreadfully dark nave, a procession of decayed clergy, grinning, and swinging incense which smoked red and gave off the same horrid odor that met me when I lifted the slab of Pietro's tomb. I collapsed against a pew; at the same time my hand came to rest upon a cross carved in relief on its side.

Dawn had already begun to spread its silver to the inside of the church when I awoke to its vast, empty hall.

III

STILL BATHED IN SWEAT, I stood up from the position into which I had crumbled a few hours earlier. I walked to the back of the church and climbed back down the stairs, each step presenting me an opportunity to exert every ounce of will power I contained.

Once in the crypt, I was faced with the choice of either replacing the slab and leaving the job to bolder men, or thoroughly searching the sarcophagus for the scroll. To my everlasting damnation, I girded up my loins, and chose the latter course.

I brought the lamp close to the corpse, and looked at it. It had not changed in any aspect from the previous night; I was happy and relieved to see that. It rather convinced me that the only thing that had chased me up the stairs and down the nave was my own fevered and overwrought mind. And I was overcome with pity for poor Pietro. While I was thus sentimentally occupied, I noticed a still bright red ribbon lying by the crushed right hand.

My heart stopped; the ribbon encircled a scroll of parchment. I grabbed it, and, with effort—I found that I was considerably weaker than I had been the previous night—replaced the slab. I quickly gathered up my tools and lights and left the church.

Even the musty odor that hung about my hands and shirt did not drive away the incomparable smell of an Italian early summer morning. Everything was as bright as gold and glory, and, by the time I had reached my lodging, my night's terror had dissolved under the mantle of drowsiness. I slept, undreaming, until I awakened of my own accord, at dusk.

With the darkness, I was wide awake, and once more a bit jittery. I dressed and took the scroll. It was almost a foot long and rather thick with folds—apparently Pietro had done quite a bit of translating before his fate had overtaken him.

I unrolled it, and it still seemed surprisingly pliant and firm after such a very long time. It was a treasure! Not only did it contain translations, but what amounted to editorial comments in the vernacular by Pietro. I do not know from what language the original had been translated, but it was now in latin, and its title stood out in disconcerting relief—*Gloriae Cruoris*; in English, roughly, the glories of blood or bloodshed. And the author's name was Serpents—whether the author's

true name or a latinization, I do not know. Pietro's opening comments are cautious and circumspect—the agony of a man trying to make something of value out of a blasphemous thing.

"Let us analyze," he writes, "the properties of blood as the learned Serpencis relates them. First, blood is the liquid of life, as the body is the vessel of life."

He then quotes Serpencis as saying that blood is the primal life force; that without it man will die, and with it, *no matter whose*, man can extend his life beyond its normal bounds. Serpencis concludes that:

"After one has committed the necessary desecrations, and has immured himself to the smell and touch of the dead, he can commune with them, liberating their souls and putting them to his own use and service. Man's power is measured by the number of souls he commands, and a great number can be attained by the twin sanctities of murder and the drinking of blood."

I sat there aghast, as Pietro must have done so many centuries ago.

"Gloriae" was the work of a vampire and necrophile who, at some remote time, either medieval or ancient, must have terrorized his neighborhood and possibly had been the leader of some foul and monstrous cult. This was not going to be easy to turn into the kind of benign and dignified research with which one gains a doctor's degree.

Still, I read on. I was too bound up in modern life to turn away from the book in fear, the way Pietro had done; as I read its gruesome pages I was battling nausea and disgust rather than terror. The margin of the manuscript contained Pietro's notes on how he combatted the evil spells he felt influencing him; he used various incantations and equally efficacious spells of white magic to dispel the aura of evil. I, of course, did not; I merely read on through the jumble of medieval latin and Italian, and descended, spiritually, to a depth of degradation and inhumanity which I had never imagined possible. Serpencis had been a master ghoul who would have made the monstrous and infamous Gilles de Retz look like an effeminate weakling.

At length I was near the end of the scroll. The last section contained what was apparently the first of a series of spells performed so that one can give one's self over to the demons who presided over vampiric activity. More a fool than ever, I decided to perform the rite.

Once the pentagram was chalked on the floor, I lit two candles and began to chant aloud from the manuscript. I was quite thrilled at reproducing a sound that had been unheard for centuries; it was in this spirit of re-enacting a play, that I first became aware of subtle changes within the room itself.

The darkness had closed in more around the candles, so that their glow spread only about six inches or so, leaving nearly the entire room and me in total darkness. Heretofore, the walls and bookcases had been dimly present, but they were now gone, and the candle closest to me illuminated the manuscript, my hand, and no more. And with this spreading blackness came now a stench that seemed to be some frightful amalgam of the twin odors of the sewer and the grave, an odor terribly similar to that in the church less than twenty-four hours earlier.

At this point I was all for stopping, for I realized that I had indeed succeeded in crossing that delicate line between the real and unreal, between the natural and the supernatural. And I was terribly frightened. But I also realized now that I was no longer in complete control over what was happening. I couldn't stop; cursing myself, I continued the daemonic chanting.

Suddenly there was a blast of foul wind, and the room glowed with a kind of ruby-red light that spread evenly from corner to corner without any seeming point of origin. There now appeared to be something forming right next to me, within the pentagram. It whirled together, like a motion picture of something flying apart that is run backwards on the projector. And as I stood there, within arm's length of it, it began to assume a horrifying, humanoid shape. I say humanoid, because, when it was formed, its dimensions were roughly human, but not close enough to be mistaken for anything other than what it was—a blasphemy from the malignant depths of hell, and the darkest corners of the human soul. Its quivering red face was turned toward me, and I could see, as I stared into it, not merely that sweating, featureless red jelly, but I could see, somehow, a vast complex of forests, rivers, mountains, a primordial land that suggested to me the vast land of Gaul when Paris was an undiscovered island, a land that would have to wait aeons for Caesar to be born to conquer it.

My terror was now too strong for whatever possessed me; I shrieked and dropped the manuscript into the whirling darkness. As the red melted quickly into a huge blackness, I saw the creature reach towards me. I felt faint, and my last memory was of being encircled in a slightly luminous and damp fog, which, though itself impalpable, carried within it a solid network of bones, which I could feel around my waist.

I do not think that I remained unconscious for more than a few minutes; when I awoke I could tell, without opening my eyes, that the room was still dark. Too frightened to move or even open my eyes, I

remained sprawled in the position in which I fell, until I was sure that sunlight had filled the room.

IV

THIS TIME THE DAWN did not bring with it the joy of life that strength that allowed me to renew my efforts at the church. I got up and searched the room, making sure that it was empty. It was, but it was also a mess. That whirling wind had torn everything loose; papers, books, utensils, even dishes, were scattered, ripped and broken. I had feverishly hoped that I would, on waking, be able to attribute the whole thing to an overactive imagination; but there was a phenomenon that was not my imagination. No, I had not dreamed.

Before I hid Pietro's monstrous work, I read his last comments on the rite I had almost completed:

"This thing is too strong for me! I cannot fight its magic—it has at its command the legions of hell, its servants, human and not human. Despite my knowledge of magic and alchemy, I barely escaped the last rite with my soul still mine and God's. I will not go on with this work and imperil my soul and salvation. God save thee, O reader, from the knowledge this book contains. Unless thou art stronger than I, attempt not even those things that are written here. Certainly seek not the book in its entirety. In the name of God, I mean to see that my copy of Glorificatio Crucis is destroyed..."

Here the manuscript breaks off, in mid-sentence. It was here, I suppose, that Pietro hurriedly hid the parchment and the manuscript, and was taken off to his doom at the hands of the Inquisition.

And I had attempted to materialize that blasphemy without the slightest knowledge of magic, white or black.

V

IT HAS NOW BEEN NEARLY A WEEK since that horrible night; I have neither worked nor slept. When I close my eyes my senses are instantly bombarded with images of red corpses and ever-present pools and fountains of blood. I have thoroughly lost my appetite, but the thought of blood makes me swell with a sensation that is closer to

hunger than anything else that I can think of. When I pass a butcher shop, I gaze at the various animals hung upside down, their throats slit and dripping blood; my own throat grows thick and my mind begins to haze with anticipation. I have to keep myself from running into the shop to do God knows what horrible and loathsome thing.

Whatever has my soul does not have it all; I can still feel, think, and function normally, but I feel myself growing less and less coherent, and the need for blood now and again fills me to the exclusion of every other thought or sensation. I cannot even seek help, as there are no longer men who are versed in the practice of white magic and magical curing; and any doctor would attribute the whole thing to some sort of fabulous psychosis, and put me in a madhouse.

Thank God there is enough of my soul and mind left at my own command so that I was able to burn the last work of Pietro of Apono. I hope that the place in which Girolamo chose to bury the original parchment will forever remain undiscovered.

Though I had unwittingly committed the first required acts of desecration, and had unwillingly undergone a sort of indecent communion with the dead spirits that apparently abound in the San Giuseppe church, I had not completed the first rite. My only hope now is to die while the good in me can still overpower the steadily growing evil influence that is corrupting my mind and body like a leprosy. I have lost all that I was and all that I could have been; but my will to good is greater than my will to evil, and thus I hope to salvage my soul while I still can.

To any readers that this may have, I ask that they pray for my soul, and not exhibit curiosity of unwholesome things. Civilized man has lost the knowledge and ability necessary to combat this kind of evil. If some unwitting fool like me should find the entire *Gloriae Cruoris*, listen to me, the latest man to be destroyed by it; do not experiment with it, do not even read it. Burn it, or God help you and humanity.

I shall now take poison, and go out into the Italian sunshine and look once more at the lovely poplar trees, which I shall miss dearly.



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At The End Of Days

by Robert Silverberg

(author of *The Unbeliever*)

There comes a time when a man has had enough—but sometimes he may decide too soon . . .

THE OLD MAN SAT QUIETLY at the edge of the hillside, watching the sun slowly drop behind the blunt purplish hills to the west. A cool night breeze drifted up from the distant river. He pulled his wrap closer around him; in these days, at his age, a chill was to be guarded against.

Not that it mattered very much, the old man thought wearily. A hundred forty years was long enough. He had no desire to live forever. Some of the young ones did; they went from rejuvenation to rejuvenation, fanning life back again and again into outworn bodies.

Not him: He had taken two treatments, one at fifty, the other at one hundred. In ten years, if he lasted that long, he would be eligible for a third treatment. But he would refuse it. He had no desire to live forever. Some of the young ones did; they went from rejuvenation to rejuvenation, fanning life back again and again into outworn bodies.

Not him. He had taken two treatments, one at fifty, the other at one hundred. In ten years, if he lasted that long, he would be eligible for a third treatment. But he would refuse it. He had come to the end of days, and Earth with him. By the grace of the Cosmos he would die tonight or tomorrow or next week, and they would put his ashes into the urn labelled *Tomas Narin*, 31116-31256, and that would be all.

Certainly a hundred forty years was enough, he thought, as the twilight colors stained the stubby mountains. He had lived long enough to see the twilight of man's culture; he had no craving to watch the last feeble flicker of life. It was nearly thirty thousand years since Man had gone forth to the stars. Not a particularly long time, as cultures went; the Neanderthals had lasted three times as long.

But now it was just over. Earth was a dying world of dying men. Some refused to admit that the end had come; others, like Narin waited quietly for it.

In the distance a song was rising, the young people were amusing themselves. Narin smiled cynically at the phrase: *the young people*.

The young people were sixty, seventy years old. Fresh from their first rejuvenation, full of false life. They would be the last. No one bore children on Earth any more. The last child born was now close to fifty. Due for his first treatment soon, Narin thought.

Why have children? It was a dying civilization. No more than a few thousand still lived on Earth. The rest were gone, out *there* somewhere. Man was finished, that was the trouble. Narin wondered what it had been like in the old days, when wonders sprouted new every day.

The wind whistled more chillingly. Narin decided that perhaps time had come for him to rise and go in. He would miss the rest of a lovely sunset, but that scarcely mattered, after all. How many thousands of sunsets had he watched?

A sudden flash of light caught his eye, not far below his terrace. A brief golden glow, becoming brighter and brighter. Colors whirled in a vortex.

Then a boy stood there, looking around uncertainly.

Narin smiled. The boy was thin and wore only a gay cloth round his waist. His arms and skinny legs were deeply tanned. He looked to be no more than ten or eleven, though Narin had difficulty in judging the age of children after so many years.

The old man said, "You'll catch cold dressed like that, boy!"

Startled, the boy whirled round, blinking in surprise. He caught sight

of Narin on the terrace above him. "Oh—hello, old man. I won't catch cold. I'm not staying long, you see."

Narin frowned intently. There was something strange about the intonation of the boy's vowels. But still, they had understood each other perfectly.

"Come up here, boy. I want to talk to you."

Spiderlike, the boy scampered up the hillside, vaulting agilely over the railing of Narin's terrace. He landed cat-like, feet-first, and saluted.

"Where are you from?" Narin asked.

"Rigel Six, sir. My name's Jorid Dason. I'm eleven years old."

Narin nodded. His guess had been accurate. "Tell me—how did you get here?"

"By quadrature, of course!"

"Quadrature?"

"Sure. You fix your co-ordinates and do the spin, and the overlapping brings you across. Don't you know?"

"No," Narin said. "I don't. It brings you here immediately?"

"Of course."

Narin had forgotten how far away Rigel was; but certainly it was a journey of many weeks, even by the fastest nullwarp ship. Yet the boy—unless he lied—had crossed space in a moment, a twinkling.

The boy said, "You mean you don't know about quadrature on Earth? This *is* Earth, isn't it?"

"Yes," Narin said. "This is Earth."

"Really, I mean. You aren't joking."

"This is Earth."

The boy did a little dance. "Then there really *is* such a place! Wait till I tell them!"

"Tell whom?"

"Rikki, Nuuri. My friends. They live on Deneb Nine. I was visiting them yesterday and they said there wasn't any such place as Earth that it was all made up like the other old legends. But this really is Earth." For the first time the boy seemed to notice the chill. "It's cold here. I'd better get back. 'Bye, mister."

The boy skipped over the railing and danced away, down the brown and dry hillside. Halfway down he leaped into the air, and performed a complicated little wriggle, and was gone.

Narin shook his head slowly. Had it been a dream? An old man's drowsy fantasy? No, he was not that far gone yet. It had been real. Out in the stars they had invented instantaneous transport, but nobody

had bothered to tell Earth about it. Of course not; Earth was only a hazy half-legend.

Narin shrugged. His pessimistic mood lifted. He saw now that he had written Mankind off prematurely—that Earth might be faded and on a thousand worlds. It was too bad the boy had left so soon, Narin thought. It might have been interesting to ask him some things. Well, perhaps he would come back some day, bringing his playmates along to show them that there really was such a place as Earth.

The wind had grown colder. Old Narin rose to go inside. The sunset was over; the hills were dark, and gray clouds hung in the blackening sky. But, bright as a billion candles, the stars were beginning to shine.

The Reckoning

There has not yet been an issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR wherein some story elicited an "x" vote from at least one reader. Our January issue came close to perfection in this respect: only one story drew an "x" vote, and that stands alone. Curious, I looked to see whether this had ever happened before. Yea, I find—it did once. In the May 1968 issue, one reader disliked *The Dark Star*; the dislike this time (our January issue) was for *When Dead Gods Wake*.

The tie in respect to first place was finally broken, and our leading story finished within a length ahead (meaning that it could have been dropped back into second place by only one ballot). The gap between the two front contenders and that next one was such that it would have taken quite a few ballots to put the third place story out in front. Here is how they finished:

(1) *The Colossus of Ylourgne*, Clark Ashton Smith; (2) *There Shall Be No Darkness*, James Blish; (3) *The Writings of Elwin Adams*, Larry Eugene Meredith; (4) *When Dead Gods Wake*, Victor Rousseau; (5) *The Phantom Ship*, Captain Frederick Marryatt.

There was some violent disagreement about the cover; I considered it a fine symbolic picture for the Blish story, and most of you agreed—but those who did not were anything but reticent.

The Devil's Bride

by Seabury Quinn

(author of *Master Nicholas*, *The Cloth of Madness*, etc.)

(Part Two)

The Story Thus Far

Beautiful Alice Hume vanished during the final rehearsal for her wedding in the presence of her fiancé and a group of friends including her mother, her family physician Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor

Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai*, the "little death" used by natives of the French Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai*.

De Grandin also believed the

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It was Aleister Crowley, back in the 20s, who formed the cult, or circle, or whatever, whose creed was "Do what thou wilt; this shall be the whole of the law." Which sounds like the ultimate in freedom at first, but really amounts to delivering the weaker into the hands of the more powerful to be done to as the more powerful wills . . . *The Devil's Bride* was Seabury Quinn's only long novel dealing with Jules de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge, although *Satan's Stepson* would be billed as a novel in many magazines today; being as long, if not longer, than some of the two-part serials that *WEIRD TALES* used to run. The story was enthusiastically received by WT's readers, and has never been reprinted before. Even as this installment was being prepared for the printer, letters and preference pages voting "yes!" on our inquiry about reprinting *The Devil's Bride* were coming in—the March issue with the first installment had not gone out to subscribers or newsstands quite yet. In this issue, we combine the original third and fourth installments of the story.

disappearance to be connected with a girdle of tanned human skin he had admired on Alice. The girl told him that the belt was known as "the luck of the Humes" and had been in the family a long time.

He found a concealed document in the family Bible, written by Alice's ancestor, David Hume, and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the devil-worshipping Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript that warned Hume's descendants that an attempt might some time be made to "bring home" one of the daughters of his line. Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidee legend and her daughter's disappearance.

But that very night Mrs. Hume was found murdered by a strangling-cord in her own boudoir.

A young, unbaptized boy was spirited away from a near-by Baptist home, and a veiled lady, who had turned against the Yezidees, was stolen out of the jail and later found crucified in the garden of a convent, before de Grandin had obtained from her the information he wanted.

Inspector Renouard, of the French secret service, arrived from overseas on the trail of the Yezidees, and joined de Grandin and Sergeant Costello of the local police. At once they were startled by the case of a young woman whose hands were cut off, tongue cut out and eyes blinded, presumably by the Yezidees. De Grandin undertakes the seemingly impossible task of finding out from her who were her assailants.

The clanging ambulance arrived in a few minutes, for the call Costello sent was urgent, and a bored young intern, collegiate raccoon coat slipped on over his whites, entered the cottage, the stretcher-bearers close behind him. "Hear you got a pretty bad case here—" he began, then straightened as he saw de Grandin. "Oh, I didn't know *you* were in charge here, Doctor," he finished.

The little Frenchman, whose uncanny skill at surgery had made his name a by-word in the local clinics, smiled amiably. "Quickly, *mon brave*," he ordered. "It is imperative that we should get her hence as rapidly as possible. I desire to converse with her."

"O. K., sir," the youngster answered. "What's wrong?" He drew out his report card and poised a pencil over it.

De Grandin nodded to the litter-bearers to begin their task as he replied: "Both hands amputated by transverse cuts incising the *pronator quadratus*; the tongue clipped across the apex, both eyes blinded by transverse knife cuts across the cornea and striking through the anterior chamber and crystalline lens."

"You—she's had all that done to her, an' you're going to *converse* with her?" the boy asked incredulously. "Don't you mean—"

"I mean precisely what I say, *mon vieux*," de Grandin told him positively. "I shall ask her certain questions, and she shall answer me. Come, make haste, or it may be too late."

At the hospital, de Grandin, aided by a wondering nurse and intern, removed the old Italian woman's makeshift bandages from the girl's severed wrists, applied a strong anodyne liniment of aconite, opium and chloroform, and wound fresh wrappings on the stumps with the speed and skill of one who served a long and strenuous apprenticeship in trench dressing-stations and field hospitals.

Some time elapsed before the strong narcotic soup administered by the old Italian lost its effect, but at length the patient showed slight signs of consciousness.

"*Ma fille*," de Grandin said, leaning forward till his lips were almost against the maimed girl's bandaged face, "you are in great trouble. You are temporarily deprived of speech and sight, but it is necessary that you tell us what you can, that we may apprehend those who did this thing to you. At present you are in Mercy Hospital, and here you will be given every care.

"Attend me carefully, if you please. I shall ask you questions. You shall answer me by spelling. Thus"—he seated himself at the foot of the

bed and placed his hand lightly on the blanket where her feet lay—"for *a* you will move your foot once, for *b* twice, and so on through the alphabet. You understand?"

A pause, then a slight movement underneath the bedclothes, twenty-five twitches of the foot, then five, finally nineteen: "Y-e-s."

"*Tres bon*, let us start." Drawing a notebook from his pocket he rested it upon his knee, then poised a stylographic pen above it. "Leave us, if you will, my friends," he ordered. "We shall be better if alone."

"Now, *ma pauvre?*" he turned toward the mutilated girl, ready to begin his interrogatory.

Something like an hour later he emerged from the sickroom, tears gleaming in his eyes and a taut, hard look about his mouth. "It is finished—done—completed," he announced, sinking wearily into a chair and in defiance of every house rule drawing out an evil-smelling French cigarette and setting it alight.

"What's finished?" I demanded.

"Everything; all!" he answered. "My questioning and the poor one; both together. Name of a miracle, I spoke truth when I told her that blond lie and said her loss of sight and speech was temporary, for now she sees and sings in God's own Paradise. The shock and loss of blood she suffered were too much—she is gone."

He drew a handkerchief from his cuff and wiped his eyes, then: "But not until she told me all did she depart," he added fiercely. "Give me a little time to put my notes in order, and I shall read them to you."

Three-quarters of an hour later he and I, Costello and Renouard were closeted in the superintendent's office.

"Her name was Veronica Brady," he began, referring to his transcript of the notes he had taken in the dead girl's room, "and she lived beneath the hill the other side the convent. She was an operative in the Hammel factory, and was due at work at slightly after seven. In order to arrive in time she had to take an early bus, and as the snow was deep, she set out early to meet the vehicle on the highway. As she was toiling up the hill this morning she was attracted by a group of people skirting the convent wall, a woman and three men. The woman was enveloped in some sort of long garment—it seemed to her like a blanket draped round her—and seemed struggling weakly and pleading with the men, two of whom pushed and drove her onward, like a beast to slaughter, while the third one walked ahead and seemed to take no notice of the others."

"They reached the convent wall, and one of the men climbed upon

another's shoulders, seized the woman and dragged her up, then leaped the wall. The second man mounted on the third one's shoulders, reached the wall-crest, then leaned down and assisted his companion up. As the last one paused a moment on the summit of the wall, preparatory to leaping over into the garden, he spied Mademoiselle Veronica, jumped down and seized her, then called to his companions. They bade him bring her, and he dragged her to the wall and forced her up to the villain waiting at the top. Thereafter they drew her to the garden, gagged her with handkerchiefs and ripped her stockings off, binding her hands and feet with them. Then, while she sat propped against the wall, she witnessed the whole vile scene. The base miscreants removed the effigy of Christ from the crucifix and broke it into pieces; then with railway spikes they nailed the woman upon the cross, and thrust a crown of barbed wire on her head and set an inscription over her. This done, they stood away and cursed her with all manner of vile oaths and pelted her with snowballs while she hung and died in torment.

"At length the coming of the dawn warned them their time was short, and so they gave attention to their second victim. Explaining that the one whom they had crucified had paid the penalty of talking, they then informed poor Mademoiselle Veronica that they would save her from such fate by making it impossible that she should betray them. And then they took the bindings from her wrists and ankles, made her resume her stockings and walk with them until they reached the wall. Across the wall they carried her; then in the snow outside they bade her kneel and clasp her hands in prayer while she looked her last upon the world.

"The poor child thought they meant to kill her. How little could she estimate their vileness! For, as she folded her hands in supplication, *zic!* a sudden knife-stroke hit her wrists, and scarcely realizing what she did, she found herself looking down at two small, clasped hands, while from her wrists there spurted streams of blood. The blow was quick and the knife sharp; she scarcely felt the stroke, she told me, for it was more like a heavy blow with a fist or club than a severing cut which deprived her of her hands.

"But before she realized what had befallen her she felt her throat seized by rough hands, and she was choked until her tongue protruded. A sudden searing pain, as though a glowing iron had been thrust into her mouth, was followed by a blaze of flashing light; then—darkness—utter, impenetrable darkness, such as she had never known before, fell on her, and in the snow she writhed in agony of mind and body. Shut off from every trace of light and with her own blood choking back the screams for help

she tried to give, in her ears was echoed the laughter of her tormenters.

"The next she knew she was lifted from the snow and borne on someone's shoulders to a house, bandages were wound about her wrists and yes, and anon a biting, bitter mixture was poured into her tortured mouth. Then merciful oblivion until she woke to find herself in Mercy Hospital with Jules de Grandin questioning her.

"Ah, it was pitiful to make her tell this story with her feet, my friends, and very pitiful it was to see her die, but far rather would I have done so than know that she must live, a maimed and blinded creature.

"*Ha*, but I have not done. No. She told me of the men who did this *sacre*, dastard thing. Their leader was a monstrous-looking creature, a person with an old and wrinkled face, not ugly, not even wicked, but rather sad and thoughtful, and in his wrinkled face there burned a pair of ageless eyes, all but void of expression, and his body was the lithe, well-formed body of a youth. His voice, too, was gentle, like his eyes, but gentle with the terrible gentleness of the hissing serpent. And though he dressed like us, upon his head was set a scarlet turban ornamented with a great greenish-yellow stone which shone and flickered, even in the half-light of the morning, like the evil eye of a ferocious tiger.

"His companions were similar in dress, although the turbans on their heads were black. One was tall, the other taller. Both were swarthy of complexion, and both were bearded.

"By their complexions and their beards, and especially by their noses, she thought them Jewish. The poor one erred most terribly and slandered a most great and noble race. We know them for what they truly were, my friends, Kurdish hellions, Yezidee followers and worshippers of Satan's unclean self!"

He finished his recital and lit another cigarette. "The net of evidence is woven," he declared. "Our task is now to cast it over them."

"Ye're right there, sor, dead right," Costello agreed. "But how're we goin' to do it?"

De Grandin looked at him a moment, then started as one who suddenly recalls a duty unperformed. "By blue," he cried, "we must at once to Monsieur the Coroner's; we must secure those photographs before it is too late!"

11. The Strayed Sheep

"HULLO, DOCTOR DE GRANDIN," Coroner Martin greeted as we entered the private office of his luxurious funeral home, "there's

been a young man from Morgan's Photonews Agency hanging around here waiting for you for the last hour or so. Said you wanted him to take some pictures, but couldn't say what. It might be all right, then again, it mightn't, and he may be on a snooping expedition—you never can tell with those fellows—so I told him to wait. He's back in the recreation room with my boys now, smoking his head off and cussing you out."

The quick smile with which de Grandin answered was more a mechanical facial contortion than an evidence of mirth. "Quite yes," he agreed. "I greatly desire that you let us take some photographs of *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue*—the nameless lady whose body you took in charge at the convent this morning. We must discover her identity, if possible. Is all prepared according to your promise?"

Professional pride was evident as Mr. Martin answered, "Come and see her, if you will."

She lay upon a bedstead in one of the secluded "slumber rooms"—apartments dedicated to repose of the dead awaiting casketing and burial—a soft silk comforter draped over her, her head upon a snowy pillow, and I had to look a second time to make sure it was she. With a skill which put the best of Egypt's famed practitioners to shame, the clever-handed mortician had eradicated every trace of violent death from the frail body of the girl, had totally obliterated the nail-marks from her slender hands and erased the cruel wounds of the barbed wire from her brow. Even the deeply burned cross-brands on her cheeks had been effaced, and on her calm, smooth countenance there was a look of peace which simulated natural sleep. The lips, ingeniously tinted, were slightly parted, as though she breathed in light, half-waking slumber, and so perfect was the illusion of life that I could have sworn I saw her bosom flutter with faint respiration.

"Marvellous, *parfait, magnifique!*" de Grandin pronounced, gazing admiringly at the body with the approval one artist may accord another's work. "If you will now permit the young man to come hither, we shall take the pictures; then we need trouble you no more."

The young news photographer set up his camera at de Grandin's orders, taking several profile views of the dead girl. Finally he raised the instrument till its lens looked directly down upon the calm, still face, and snapped a final picture.

Next day the photographs were broadcast to the papers with the caption: "Who Knows Her? Mystery woman, found wandering in the streets of Harrisonville, N. J., was taken to the psychopathic ward of City Hospital, but managed to escape. Next morning she was found dead from exposure

in a garden in the suburbs. Authorities are seeking for some clue to her identity, and any one who recognizes her is asked to notify Sergeant J. Costello, Detective Bureau, Harrisonville Police Dept. (Photo by Morgan's Photonews, Inc.)"

We waited several days, but no response came in. It seemed that we had drawn a blank.

At last, when we had about abandoned hope, the telephone called me from the dinner table, and Costello's heavy voice advised: "There's a young felly down to headquarters, sor, that says he thinks he recognizes that there now unknown gur-ri. Says he saw her picture in th' *Springfield Echo*. Will I take 'im over to th' coroner's?"

"Might as well," I answered. "Ask Mr. Martin to let him look at the body; then, if he still thinks he knows her, bring him over and Doctor de Grandin and I will talk with him."

"Right, sor," Costello promised. "I'll not be botherin' ye wid anny false alarrms." I went back to dessert, Renouard and Jules de Grandin.

Some three-quarters of an hour later while we sipped our postprandial coffee and liqueurs in the the drawing-room, the doorbell shrilled and Nora ushered in Costello and a serious-faced young man. "Shake hands wid Mr. Kimble, gentlemen," the sergeant introduced. "He knows her, a'right. Identified her positively. He'll be daimin' th' remains in th' mornin', if ye've no objections."

De Grandin shook hands cordially enough, but his welcome was restrained. "You can tell whence the poor young lady came, and what her name was, perhaps, *Monstieur*?" he asked, when the visitors had been made comfortable with cognac and cigars.

Young Mr. Kimble flushed beneath the little Frenchman's direct, unwinking stare. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, hatchet-faced, bespectacled. Such animation as he had seemed concentrated in his rather large and deep-set hazel eyes. Except for them he was utterly commonplace, a man of neutral coloring, totally undistinguished, doomed by his very nature to the self-effacement consequent upon unconquerable diffidence. "A clerk or bookkeeper," I classified him mentally, "possibly a junior accountant or senior routine worker of some sort." Beside the debonair de Grandin, the fiery and intense Renouard and the brawny, competent Costello he was like a sparrow in the company of tanagers.

Now, however, whatever remnant of emotion remained in his drab, repressed personality welled up as he replied: "Yes sir, I can tell you; her name was Abigail Kimble. She was my sister."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured thoughtfully, drawing at his cigar. Then, as the other remained silent:

"You can suggest, perhaps, how it came she was found in the unfortunate condition which led to her incarceration in the hospital, and later to her so deplorable demise?" Beneath the shadow of his brows he watched the young man with a cat-stare of unwinking vigilance, alert to note the slightest sign betokening that the visitor had greater knowledge of the case than the meager information in the newspaper supplied.

Young Kimble shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he replied. "I hadn't seen her for two years; didn't have the slightest idea where she was." He paused a moment, fumbling nervously with his cigar; then: "Whatever I may say will be regarded confidentially?" he asked.

"But certainly," de Grandin answered.

The young man tossed his cigar into the fire and leaned forward, elbows on knees, fingers interlaced. "She was my sister," he repeated huskily. "We were born and reared in Springfield. Our father was—" He paused again and hunted for a word, then: "A tyrant, a good church-member and according to his lights a Christian, so righteous that he couldn't be religious, so pious that he couldn't find it in him to be kind or merciful. You know the breed. We weren't allowed to play cards or dance, or even go to parties; he was afraid we might play 'kissing games'. We had family prayers each night and morning, and on Sunday weren't allowed to play—my sister's dolls and all my toys were put away each Saturday and not allowed outside the closet till Monday morning. Once when he caught me reading *Moby Dick*—I was a lad of fifteen, too, then—he snatched it from me and threw it in the fire. He'd 'tolerate no novel-reading in a Christian home,' he told me.

"I stood for it; I reckon it was in me from my Puritan ancestors, but Abigail was different. Our grandfather had married an Irish girl—worked her to death and broke her heart with pious devilishness before she was twenty-five—and Abigail took after her. Looked like her, too, they said. Father used to pray with her, pray that she'd be able to 'tear the sinful image of the Scarlet Woman' from her heart and give herself to Jesus. Then he'd beat her for her soul's salvation, praying all the time."

A bitter smile lit up his somber features, and something, some deep-rooted though almost eradicated spirit of revolt, flickered in his eyes a moment. "You can imagine what effect such treatment would have on a high-spirited girl," he added. "When Abby was seventeen she ran away.

"My father cursed her, literally. Stood in the doorway of our home and raised his hands to heavens while he called God's curse upon a wilful, disobedient child."

Again the bitter, twisted smile flickered across his face. "I think his God heard him," he concluded.

"But, *Monsieur*, are we to understand you did not again behold your so unfortunate sister until—" de Grandin paused with upraised brows.

"Oh, yes, I saw her," the young man answered caustically. "She ran away, as I said, but in her case the road of the transgressor was hard. She'd been brought up to call a leg a limb and to think the doctors brought babies in their satchels. She learned the truth before a year had gone.

"I got a note from her one day, telling me she was at a farmhouse outside town and that she was expecting a baby. I was working then and making fairly good money for a youngster, keeping books in a hardware store, but my father took my wages every Saturday night, and I was allowed only a dollar a week from them. I had to put that on the collection plate on Sunday.

"When Abby's letter came I was almost frantic. I hadn't a nickel I could use, and if I went to my father he would quote something from the Bible about the wages of sin being death, I knew.

"But if you're driven far enough you can usually manage to make plans. I did. I deliberately quit my job at Hoeschler's. Picked a fight with the head bookkeeper, and made 'em discharge me.

"Then I told my father, and though I was almost twenty-one years old, he beat me till I thought I'd drop beneath the torture. But it was all part of my plan, so I gritted my teeth and bore it.

"I'd got the promise of another job before I quit the first one, so I went to work at the new place immediately; but I fooled the old man. My new salary was twenty dollars a week, twice as much as I'd received before, but I told him I had to take a cut in pay, and that they gave me only ten. I steamed the pay envelope open and took out ten dollars, then revealed it and handed it to him with remaining ten each Saturday. He never knew the difference.

"As quickly as I could I went to see my sister, told her not to worry, and engaged a doctor. I paid him forty dollars on account and signed notes for the balance. Everything was fixed for Abigail to have the proper care.

"He was a pretty little fellow, her baby; pretty and sweet and innocent as though he hadn't been a"—he halted, gagging on the ugly word, then ended lamely—"as if his mother had been married.

"Living was cheaper in those days, and Abby and the baby made out nicely at the farm for 'most two years. I'd had two raises in pay, and turned the increase over to her, and she managed to pick up some

spare change at odd work, too, so everything went pretty well—" He stopped again, and the knuckles of his knitted hands showed white and bony as the fingers laced together with increased pressure.

"Yes my friend, until—" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Till she was taken sick," young Kimble finished. "It was influenza. We'd been pretty hard hit up Springfield way that spring, and Abigail was taken pretty bad. Pneumonia developed, and the doctor didn't hold out much hope to her. Her conscience was troubling her for running out on the old man and on account of the baby, too. I guess. Anyhow, she asked to see a minister.

"He was a young man, just out of the Methodist seminary, with a mouth full of Scriptural quotations and a nose that itched to get in other people's business. When she'd confessed her sin he prayed with her a while, then came hot-foot to the city and spilled the story to my father. Told him erring was human, but forgiveness divine, and that he had a chance to bring the lost sheep back into the fold—typical preacher's cant, you know.

"I was of age, then, but still living home. The old man came to me and taxed me with my perfidy in helping Abby in her life of shameful sin, and—what was worse!—holding back some of my salary from him. Then he began to pray, likening himself to Abraham and me to Isaac, and asking God to give strength to his arm that he might purge me of all sin, and tried to thrash me.

"I said *tried*, gentlemen. The hardware store I worked in had carried a line of buggy-whips, but the coming of the motor car had made them a back number. We hadn't had a call for one in years, and several of the men had brought the old things home as souvenirs. I had one. My father hit me, striking me in the mouth with his clenched fist and bruising my lips till they bled. Then I let him have it. All the abuse I'd suffered from that sanctimonious old devil since my birth seemed crying out for redress right then, and, by God, it got it! I lashed him with that whip till it broke in my hands, then I beat him with the stock till he cried for mercy. When I say 'cried', I mean just that. He howled and bellowed like a beaten boy, and the tears ran down his face as he begged me to stop flogging him.

"Then I left his house and never entered it again, not even when they held his funeral from it.

"But that didn't help my sister. The old man knew where she was living, and as soon as his bruises were healed he went out there, saw the landlady and told her he was the baby's grandfather and had come to take it

home. My sister was too sick to be consulted, so the woman let him take the boy. He took him to an orphanage, and the child died within a month. Diphtheria immunization costs money, and the folks who ran that home—it was proof of a lack of faith in Providence to vaccinate the children for diphtheria, they said; but when you herd two hundred children in a place and one of 'em comes down with the disease, there's bound to be some duplication. Little Arthur died and they were going to bury him in Potter's Field, but I heard of it and claimed the body and gave it decent burial.

"My sister lay half-way between life and death for weeks. Finally she was well enough to ask for her son, and they told her he had gone off with his grandfather. She was almost wild with fear of what the old man might do to the child, but still too weak to travel, and the nervous strain she labored under set her back still further. It was nearly midsummer when she finally went to town.

"She went right to the house and demanded that he give her back her child—told him she'd never asked him for a cent and never would, and every penny that he'd paid out for the little boy would be refunded to him.

"He'd learned his lesson from me, but my sister was a mere woman, weak from recent illness; no need to guard his tongue while he talked with her. And so he called her every vile name imaginable and told her that her hope of heaven was gone, for she was living with a parent's curse upon her. Finally he told her that her child was dead and buried in a pauper's grave. He knew that was a lie, but he couldn't forego the joy of hurting her by it.

"She came to me, half crazed with grief, and I did what I could to soothe her. I told her that the old man lied, and knew he lied, and that little Arthur had been buried in Graceland, with a tombstone set above his grave. Then, of course, she wanted to go see the place."

Tears were falling from the young man's eyes as he concluded: "I never shall forget that afternoon, the last time that I ever saw my little sister living. It was nearly dark when we reached the grave, and she had to kneel to make out the inscription on the stone. Then she went down, like a mother bending by a crib, and whispered to the grass above her baby's face, 'Good-night, little son; good-night and happy dreams; I'll see you early in the morning.' Then realization seemed to come to her. 'Oh, God,' she cried, 'there won't be any morning! Oh, my baby; my little baby boy! They took you from me and killed you, little son—they and their God!'

"And then beside her baby's grave she rose and held her hands up to the sky and cursed the father who begot her and who had done this thing

to her; she cursed his church and his religion, cursed his God and all His works, and swore allegiance to the Devil! I'm not a religious man, gentleman. I had too big an overdose of it when I was a child, and I've never been in church since I left my father's house; but that wild defiance of hers and her oath of fealty to everything we'd been taught to hate and fear fairly gave me the creeps.

"I never saw her from that night to this. I gave her a hundred dollars, and she took the evening train to Boston, where I understand she got mixed up with all sorts of radical movements. The last I heard of her before I saw her picture in the paper yesterday was when she wrote me from New York saying she'd met a Russian gentleman who was preaching a new religion; one she could subscribe to and accept. I didn't quite understand what it was all about, but I gathered it was some sort of New Thought cult, or something of the kind. Anyway, 'Do What Thou Wilt, This Shall Be the Whole of the Law,' was its gospel, as she wrote it to me."

De Grandin leaned forward, his little round blueeyes alight with interest and excitement. "Have you, by any chance, a picture of your little nephew, *Monsieur ?*" he asked.

"Why, yes, I think so," young Kimble answered. "Here's a snapshot I took of him and Abigail out at the farm the winter before her illness. He was about eight or nine months old then." From an inner pocket he drew a leather wallet and from it took a worn and faded photograph.

"*Morbleu*, I damn knew it; of course, that is the explanation!" de Grandin cried as he looked at the picture. "Await me, my friends, I shall return at once!" he shouted, leaping from his seat and rushing from the room.

In a moment he was back, another picture in his hand. "Compare," he ordered sharply; "put them together, and tell me what it is you see."

Mystified but eager, Renouard, Costello and young Kimble leaned over my shoulder as I laid the photographs side by side upon the coffee table. The picture to the right was the one Kimble furnished us. It showed a woman, younger than the one we knew, and with the light of happiness upon her face, but indisputably the beautiful veiled lady whose tragic death had followed her visit to us. In her arms nestled a pretty, dimpled little boy with dark curling hair clustering in tendrils round his baby ears, and eyes which fairly shone with life and merriment.

The picture to the left was one de Grandin had obtained from the Baptist Home of the little Eastman boy who vanished. Though slightly younger, his resemblance to the other child was startling. Line for line

and feature for feature, each was almost the perfect duplicate of the other.

De Grandin tweaked his mustache as he returned the snapshot to young Kimble. "Thank you, *Monsieur*," he said; "your story has affected us profoundly. Tomorrow, if you will make formal claim to your sister's body, no obstacle to its release will be offered by the coroner, I promise you." Behind the visitor's back he made violent motions to Costello, indicative to our wish to be alone.

The Irishman was quick to take the hint, and in a few minutes had departed with young Mr. Kimble. Half an hour later he rejoined us, a frown of deep perplexity upon his brow.

"I'll bite, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he confessed. "What's it all about?"

12. *The Trail of the Serpent*

"BUT IT IS OBVIOUS," the little Frenchman answered. "Do not you see it, Renouard, Trowbridge?" he turned his bright bird-like gaze on us.

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "Just what connection there is between the children's resemblance and—"

"*Ahe bah!*" he interrupted. "It is elementary. Consider, if you please. This poor Mademoiselle Abigail, she was hopelessly involved with the Satanists, is it not so?"

"Yes," I agreed. "From what her brother told us, there's not much doubt that the sect with which she was connected is the same one Renouard told us about, but—"

"But be roasted on the grates of hell! Can you think no farther back than the hinder side of your own neck, great stupid one? What did she say when she came rushing to this house at dead of night and begged us for protection? Think, remember, if you can."

"Why, she was raving incoherently; it's rather hard to say that anything she told us was important, but—"

"*Dites*—more of your *sacre* buts! Attend me: She came to us immediately after the small Baptist one had been abducted, and she did declare: 'He was the image of my dear little—' Her statement split upon that word, but in the light of what we now know, the rest is obvious. The little Eastman child resembled her dead baby; she could not bear to see him slaughtered, and cried out in horror at the act. When they persisted in this fiendishness she threatened them with us—with me, to be exact—and ran away to tell us how they might be found. They shot at

her, and wounded her, but she won through to us, and though she raved in wild delirium, she told enough to put us on the trail. But certainly. Did she not say, 'Watch for the chalk-signs of the Devil—follow the pointed trident?' But yes."

He turned to Sergeant Costello and demanded: "And have your men been vigilant, *mon vieux*? Do they keep watch for childish scrawls on house or fence or sidewalk, as I bade?"

Costello eyed him wonderingly. "Sure, they are," he answered. "Th' whole force has its orders to look out for 'em, though th' saints know that ye're after wantin' wid 'em when ye find 'em."

"Very good," de Grandin nodded. "Attend me. I have known such things before. You, too, Renouard. Only a word was needed to put me on the trail. That word was furnished by the poor young woman whom they crucified.

"In Europe, when the Satanists would gather for their wicked rites they send some secret message to their members, but never do they tell the place of meeting. No, the message might be intercepted and the police come. What then?

"Upon the walls of houses, on sidewalks, or on fences they draw a crude design of Satan, a foolish, childish thing which will escape notice as the scrawling of naughty little boys, but each of these drawings differs from the others, for whereas one will have the Devil's pitchfork pointing one way, another will point in a different direction. The variation will not be noticed by one who does not know the significance of the scrawls, but to those who know for what they look the pointing tridents are plain as markers on a motor highway. One need but follow the direction of the pointing tridents from picture to picture in order to be finally led right to the door of Satan's temple. Yes; of course. It is so."

"Indubitably," Renouard accorded, with a vehement nod.

"But what's th' little Eastman boy to do wid it?" Costello asked.

"Everything, *parbleu*," de Grandin and Renouard replied in sober chorus.

"It was undoubtedly for the Black Mass—the Mass of Saint Secaire—the little one was stolen. Satan is the *singe de Dieu*—the impudent imitator of God and in his service is performed a vile parody of the celebration of the mass. The celebrant is, when possible, an unfrocked priest, but if such a one can not be found to do the office, any follower of the Devil may serve.

"In the latter case a wafer already consecrated must be stolen from the monstrance of a church or impiously borne from communion in the

mouth of a mock-communicant. Then, robed as a priest, the buffoon who officiates ascends the Devil's altar and mouths the words prescribed in the missal, but reverses all the ritual gestures, kneeling backward to the altar, signing himself with the cross upside down and with his left hand reciting such prayers as he pleases backward. At the end he holds aloft the sacred Host, but instead of veneration the wretched congregation shrieks out insults, and the elements are then thrown to the ground and trampled underfoot.

"Ha, but if a renegade priest can be persuaded to officiate, there is the foulest blasphemy of all, for he still has the words of power and the right to consecrate the elements, and so he says the mass from start to finish. For greater blasphemy the altar is the naked body of a woman, and when the rubric compels the celebrant to kiss the sanctuary, his lips are pressed against the human faircloth. The holy bread is consecrated, likewise the wine, but with the wine there is mingled the lifeblood of a little unbaptized baby boy. The celebrant, the deacon and subdeacon partake of this unholy drink, then share it with the congregation, and also they accept the wafer, but instead of swallowing it in reverence they spit it forth with grimaces of disgust and every foul insult.

"You apprehend? The Mass of Saint Secaire was duly celebrated on the night poor Mademoiselle Abigail came knocking at our door, and the little Eastman boy had been the victim. You noticed that she wore no clothing, save her outdoor wraps? Was that mere eccentricity? No, *parbleu*, it was evidence; no less. Evidence that she quit the nest of devils as she was and came forthwith to us with information which should lead to their undoing. She had undoubtedly served as altar cloth that night, my friends, and did not tarry for an instant when she fled—not even long enough to clothe herself. The little victim of that night so much resembled her dead babe that the frozen heart within her was softened all at once, and she became once more a woman with a woman's tender pity, instead of the cold instrument of evil which her pious devil of a father had made her. Certainly. The strayed sheep had come back into the fold."

He tore the end from a blue packet of French cigarettes, set one of the vile-smelling things in his eight-inch amber holder, and thoughtfully ignited it "Renouard, *mon vieux*," he said, "I have thought deeply on what you told us. I was reluctant at the first to credit what the evidence disclosed, but now I am convinced. When the small Eastman boy was stolen I could not fit the rough joints of the puzzle to each other. Consider—He spread his finger fanwise and checked the items off on them:

"Mademoiselle Alice disappears, and I find evidence that *bulala-gwai* was used. 'What are the meaning of this?' I ask me. 'This snuff-of-sleep, he is much used by savage Africans, but why should he be here? It are a puzzle.'

"Next we find proof that Mademoiselle Alice is the lineal descendant—presumably the last one—of that Devil's priest of olden days whose daughter married David Hume. We also see that a spy of the Yezidees has proved her identity to his own satisfaction before she is abducted. The puzzle is more mystifying.

"Then we do find poor Madame Hume all dead. The outward evidence says 'suicide!' but I find the hidden proof of murder. Murder by the roomal of the *Thags* of India. *Que diable?* The *Thags* are worshippers of Kali, the Black Goddess, who is a sort of female devil, a disreputable half-sister of the Evil One, and in her honor they commit all sorts of murders. But what, I ask to know, are *they* doing here? Already we have Yezidees of Kurdistan, witch-doctors from Central Africa, now *Thags* from India injected in this single case. *Mon Dieu*; I suffer *mal de tete* from thinking, but nowhere can I find one grain of logic in it. *Non*, not anywhere, *cordieu!*

"Anon the little Eastman baby disappears. He is a Baptist; therefore, unbaptized. Time was, I know, when such as he were wanted for the mass of wickedness, but how can he be wanted by the Yezidees? They have no dealings with the Mass of Saint Secaire, the aping of a Christian rite is not a part of their dark ceremonies; yet here we have *bulala-gwai* again, and *bulala-gwai* was also used when the Yezidees—presumably—stole Mademoiselle Alice from before our very eyes.

"Have the Yezidees, whose cult is rooted in obscure antiquity, and dates back far beyond the Christian Era, combined the rites of medieval Satanists?' I ask. It are not likely, yet what is one to think?

"Then comes this poor young woman and in her delirium lets fall some words which, in the light of what we know tonight, most definitely connects the stolen baby—the baby stolen even as Mademoiselle Alice was—with the sacrifice of the Mass of Saint Secaire.

"Now I think of you and what you tell us. How you have found unfortunate young women, all branded on the breast like Mademoiselle Abigail, all of them once members of the sect of Satanists, each chapter of which unclean cult is led or inspired by one from Russia. And you tell us of this League of Godlessness which is a poisonous fungus spreading through the world from that cellar of unclean abominations we call Russia.

"'Pains of a most dyspeptic bullfrog,' I inform me, 'I see a little, so small light!' And by that light I read the answer to my riddle. It is this: As business men may take a dozen old and bankrupt enterprises possessed of nothing but old and well-known names, and weld them into one big and modern corporation which functions under a new management, so have these foes of all religion seized on the little, so weak remnants of diabolism and welded them together in a formidable whole. In Africa, you say, the cannibal Leopard Men are on the rampage. The emissaries of Moscow are working with them—have they not brought back the secret of *bulala-gwai* to aid them in their work? In Kurdistan the Yezidees, an obscure sect, scarce able to maintain itself because it is ringed round by Moslems, is suddenly revived, shows new activity. Russia, which prays the world for charity to feed its starving people, can always find capital to stimulate its machinations in otherlands. The Arabian gendarmerie find European pilgrims en route to Mount Lalesh, the stronghold of the Yezidees; such things were never known before, but—

"'Ha, another link in this so odious chain!' I tell me. 'In Europe and in America the cult of Satanism, almost dead as witchcraft, is suddenly revived in all its awful detail. That it is growing rapidly is proved by the number of renegade clergymen of all faiths, a number never paralleled before in such short time. From all sides comes evidence of its activities; from London, Paris and Berlin we hear of violated churches; little children—*always boys*—are stolen in increasing numbers and are not held to ransom; they merely disappear. The connection is most obvious. Now we have proof that this vile cult is active in America—right here in Harrisonville, *parbleu*.'

"My friends, upon the crumbling ruins of the ancient Yezidee religion and the time-obliterated relics of witchcraft and demonism of the Middle Ages, this Union of the Godless are rearing a monstrous structure designed to crush out all religion with its weight. The trail of the serpent lies across the earth; already his folds are tightening round the world. We must annihilate him, or he will surely strangle us. Yes. Certainly."

"But Alice—" I began. "What connection has she with all this—"

"Much—all—everything," he cut in sharply. "Do you not recall what the secret agents of France have said, that in the East there is talk of a white prophetess who shall raise the Devil's standard and lead his followers on to victory against the Crescent and the Cross? That prophetess is Alice Hume! Consolidated with the demonology of the West, the Devil-Worship of the East will take new force. She has been sought—she has been found, *cordieu*!—and anon she will be taken to some place

appointed for her marriage to the Devil; then, with the fanaticism of the Yezidees and the fervor of the atheistic converts as a motivating force, with the promise of the Devil's own begotten son to come eventually as a result of this marriage, with the gold of Soviet Russia and the contributions of wealthy ones who revel in the freedom to do wickedness this new religion gives, they will advance in open warfare. The time to act is now. If we can rescue Mademoiselle Alice and exterminate the leaders of this movement, we may succeed in stemming the tide of hell's rebellion. Failing that"—he spread his hands and raised his shoulders in a shrug of resignation.

"All right," I countered, "how do we go about it? Alice has been gone two weeks—ten days, to be exact—and we haven't the slightest clue to her location. She may be here in Harrisonville, she may have gone to Kurdistan, for all we know. Why aren't we looking for her?"

He gazed at me a moment, then: "I do not lance an abscess till conditions warrant it," he answered. "Neither do we vent our efforts fruitlessly in this case. Mademoiselle Alice is the focal point of all these vile activities. Where she is, there are the leaders of the Satanists, and—where they are, there is she.

"From what Mademoiselle Abigail told us, we may assume there will be other celebrations of the Mass of Wickedness—when we find one of these and raid it, our chances of finding Alice are most excellent. Costello's men are on the lookout, they will inform us when the signs are out; until that time we jeopardize our chances of success by any move we make. I feel—I know—the enemy is concentrated here, but if we go to search for him he will decamp, and instead of the city which we know so well, we shall have to look for him only God knows where. *Alors*, our best activity is inactivity."

"But," I persisted, "what makes you think they're still in the city? Common sense would have warned them to get out before this, you'd think, and—"

"*Non*; you mistake," he told me bluntly. "The safest hiding-place is here. Here they logically should not be, hence this is the last place in which we should be thought to look for them. Again, temporarily at least, this is their headquarters in America. To carry out such schemes as they plan requires money, and much money can be had from converts to their cult. Wealthy men, who might fear to follow nothing but the dictates of their unconscionable consciences, will be attracted by the freedom which their creed permits, and will join them willingly—and willingly contribute to their treasury. It is in hope of further converts that they

linger here, as well as to await the blowing over of the search for Alice. When the hue and cry has somewhat abated, when some later outrage claims the public interest, they can slip out all unnoticed. Until that time they are far safer in the shadows of police headquarters than if they took to hasty flight, and—"

Br-r-r-ring! The telephone's sharp warning shut him off.

"Costello? Yes, just a moment," I answered, passing the instrument to the sergeant.

"Yeah, sure—eh? Glory be to God!" Costello said, responding to the message from across the wire. To us: "Come on, gentlemen; it's time to git our feet against the pavement," headmonished. "Two hours ago some murderin' hoodlums beat up a nursemaid wheelin' a baby home from a visit wid its grandmother, an' run off wid it. An' the boys have found th' chalk-marks on th' sidewalks. It looks—"

"*Non d'un chou-fleur*, it looks like action!" de Grandin cried exultantly. "Come, Friend Trowbridge; come, my Renouard, let us go at once, right away, immediately!"

Renouard and he hurried up the stairs while I went to the garage for the car. Two minutes later they joined us, each with a pair of pistols belted to his waist. In addition to the firearms, de Grandin wore a long, curve-bladed Gurkha knife, a wicked, razor-bladed weapon capable of lopping off a hand as easily as a carving-knife takes off the wing of a roast fowl.

Costello was fuming with impatience. "Shtep on it, Doctor Trowbridge, sor," he ordered. "Th' first pitcher wuz at Twenty-eighth an' Hopkins Streets; if ye'll take us there we'll be after follyin' th' trail. I've tellyphoned to have a raidin' party meet us there in fifteen minutes."

"But it is grand, it is immense; it is magnificent, my friend!" de Grandin told Renouard as we slipped through the darkened streets.

"It is superb!" Renouard assured de Grandin.

"Bedad, here's where Ireland declares war on Kur-r-distan!" Costello told them both.

13. Inside the Lines

A LARGE, BLACK AND VERY SHINY limousine was parked at the curb near the intersection of Twenty-eighth and Hopkins Streets, and toward it Costello led the way when we halted at the corner. The vehicle had all the earmarks of hailing from some high-class mortician's

garage, and this impression was heightened by a bronze plate displayed behind the windshield with the legend *Funeral Car* in neat block letters. But there was nothing funereal—except perhaps potentially—about the eight passengers occupying the tonneau. I recognized Officers Hornsby, Gilligan and Schultz, each with a canvas web-belt decorated with a service revolver and nightstick buckled outside his blouse, and with a vicious-looking sub-machine gun resting across his knees. Five others, similarly belted, but equipped with fire axes, boathooks and slings of tear-bombs, huddled out of sight of casual passers-by on the seats of the car. "Camouflage," Costello told us with a grin, pointing to the funeral sign; then: "All set, Hornsby? Got ever'thing, axes, hooks, tear-bombs, an—"

"All jake, sir. Got th' works," the other interrupted. "Where's th' party?"

The sergeant beckoned the patrolman loitering at the corner. "Where is it?" he demanded.

"Right here, sir," the man returned, pointing to a childish scrawl on the cement sidewalk.

We examined it by the light of the street lamp. Unless warned of its sinister connotation, no one would have given the drawing a second glance, so obviously was it the mark of mischievous but not exceptionally talented children. A crudely sketched figure with pot-belly, triangular head and stiffly jointed limbs was outlined on the sidewalk in white chalk of the sort every schoolboy pilfers from the classroom. Only a pair of parentheses sprouting from the temples and a pointed beard and mustache indicated the faintest resemblance to the popular conception of the Devil, and the implement the creature held in its unskilfully drawn hand might have been anything from a fishing-pole to a pitchfork. Nevertheless, there was one fact which struck us all. Instead of brandishing the weapon overhead, the figure pointed it definitely toward Twenty-ninth Street. De Grandin's slender nostrils twitched like those of a hunting dog scenting the quarry as he bent above the drawing. "We have the trail before us," he whispered. "Come, let us follow it. *Allons!*"

"Come on, youse guys; folly us, but don't come too close unless we signal," Costello ordered the men waiting in the limousine.

Down Hopkins Street, shabby, down-at-the-heel thoroughfare that it was, we walked with all the appearance of nonchalance we could muster, paused at Twenty-ninth Street and looked about. No second guiding figure met our eye.

"*Dame!*" de Grandin swore. "*C'est singulier*. Can we have—*ah, regardezvous, mes amis!*" The tiny fountain-pen searchlight he had

swung in an everwidening circle had picked out a second figure, scarcely four inches, high, scribbled on the red-brick front of a vacant house. The trident in the demon's hand directed us down Twenty-ninth Street toward the river.

A moment only we stopped to study it, and all of us were impressed at once with one outstanding fact; crudely drawn as it was, the second picture was a duplicate in miniature of the first, the same technique, if such a word could be applied to such a scrawl, was evident in every wavering line and faulty curve of the small picture. "*Morbleu*," de Grandin murmured, "he was used to making these, the one who laid this trail. This is no first attempt."

"*Mais non*," Renouard agreed.

"Looks that way," I acquiesced.

"Sure," said Costello. "Let's get goin'."

Block after block we followed the little sprawling figures of the Devil scrawled on sidewalk, wall or fence, and always the pointing tridents led us toward the poorer, unkempt sections of the city. At length, when we had left all residential buildings and entered a neighborhood of run-down factories and storehouses, de Grandin raised his hand to indicate a halt.

"We would better wait our reinforcements," he cautioned; "there is too great an opportunity for an ambuscade in this deserted quarter, and—*ah, par la barbe d'un poisson rouge!*" he cried. "We are in time, I think. Observe him, if you please."

Fifty or a hundred yards beyond us a figure moved furtively. He was a shadow of a man, sliding noiselessly and without undue movement, though with surprising speed, through the little patch of lumiance cast by a flickering gas street-lamp. Also he seemed supremely alert, perceptive and receptive with the sensitiveness of a wild animal of the jungle stalking wary prey. The slightest movement of another in the semi-darkness near him would have needed to be more shadow-silent than his own to escape him.

"This," remarked Renouard, "will bear investigating. Let me do it, my Jules. I am accustomed to this sort of hunting." With less noise than a swimmer dropping into a darkened stream he disappeared in the shadow of a black-walled warehouse, to emerge a moment later half-way down the block where a street lamp stained the darkness with its feeble light. Then he melted into the shadow once again.

We followed, silently as possible, lessening the distance between Ren-

ouard and ourselves as quickly as we could, but making every effort at concealment.

Renouard and the shadow-man came together at the dead-end of a cross-street where the oil-stained waters of the river lapped the rotting piles.

"Hands up, my friend!" Renouard commanded, emerging from the darkness behind his quarry with the suddenness of a magic-lantern view thrown on a screen. "I have you under cover; if you move, your prayers had best be said!" He advanced a pace, pressing the muzzle of his heavy pistol almost into the other's neck, and reached forward with his free hand to feel, with a trained policeman's skill, for hidden weapons.

The result was surprising, though not especially pleasing. Like an inflated ball bounced against the floor, Renouard rose in the air, flew over the other's shoulder and landed with a groan of suddenly-expelled breath against the cobblestones, flat upon his back. More, the man whose skill at jujitsu accomplished his defeat straightened like a coiled steel spring suddenly released, drew an impressively large automatic pistol and aimed it at the supine Frenchman. "Say *your* prayers, if you know any, you"—he began, but Costello intervened.

Lithe and agile as a tiger, for all his ponderous bulk, the Irishman cleared the space between them with a single leap and swung his club in a devastating arc. The man sagged at the knees and sank face forward to the street, his pistol sliding from his unnerved hand and lying harmless in the dust beside him.

"That's that," remarked the sergeant. "Now, let's have a look at this felly."

He was a big man, more lightly built, but quite as tall as the doughty Costello, and as the latter turned him over, we saw that though his hair was iron-gray, his face was young, and deeply tanned. A tiny, dark mustache of the kind made popular by Charlie Chaplin and British sub-alterns during the war adorned his upper lip. His clothes were well cut and of good material, his boots neatly polished, and his hands, one of which was ungloved, well cared for—obviously a person with substantial claims to gentility, though probably one lacking in the virtue of good citizenship, I thought.

Costello bent to loose the buttons of the man's dark overcoat, but de Grandin interposed a quick objection. "*Mais non, mon sergent,*" he reproved, "our time is short. Place manacles upon his hands and give him into custody. We can attend to him at leisure; at present we have more important pots upon the fire."



"Say your prayers, if you know any, you—" he began, but Costello intervened.

"Right ye are, sor," the Irishman agreed with a grin, locking a pair of handcuffs on the stunned man's wrists. He raised his hand in signal, and as the limousine slid noiselessly alongside: "Keep an eye on this bur-r-d, Hornsby," he ordered. "We'll be wantin' to give 'im th' wor-rks at headquarters—afther we git through wid this job, y'understand."

Officer Hornsby nodded assent, and we returned to our queer game of hare and hounds.

It might have been a half-hour later when we came to our goal. It was a mean building in a mean street. The upper floors were obviously designed for manufacturing, for half a dozen signs proclaimed that desirable lofts might be rented from as many agents. "Alterations Made

to Suit Tenant for a Term of Years." The ground floor had once been occupied by an emporium dispensing spirituous, malt and vinous liquors, and that the late management had regarded the law of the land with more optimism than respect was evident from the impressive padlock on the door and the bold announcement that the place was "Closed by Order of U.S. District Court."

Beside the door of what had been the family entrance in days gone by was a sketch of Satan, his trident pointing upward—the first of the long series of guiding sketches to hold the spear in such position. Undoubtedly the meeting-place was somewhere in the upper portion of the empty-seeming building, but when we sought an entrance every door was closed and firmly barred. All, indeed, were furnished with stout locks on the outside. The evidence of vacancy was plain and not to be disputed, whatever the Satanic scrawl might otherwise imply.

"Looks like we're up agin a blank wall, sor," Costello told de Grandin. "This place is empty as a bass drum - probably ain't had a tenant since th' prohibition men got sore 'cause someone cut off their protection money an' slapped a padlock on th' joint."

De Grandin shook his head in positive negation. "The more it seems deserted the more I am convinced we are arrived at the right place," he answered. "These locks, do they look old?"

"H'm," the sergeant played his searchlight on the nearest lock and scratched his head reflectively. "No, sor, I can't say they do," he admitted. "If they'd been here for a year—an' th' joint's been shut almost that long—they ought to show more weather-stain, but what's that got to do wid—"

"Ah, bah," de Grandin interrupted, "to be slow of perception is the policeman's prerogative, but you abuse the privilege, my friend! What better means of camouflage than this could they desire? The old locks are removed and new ones substituted. Each person who is bidden to the rendezvous is furnished with a key; he follows where the pointing spears of Satan lead, opens the lock and enters. *Voilà tout!*"

"Wallah me eye," the Irishman objected. "Who's goin' to lock up afther 'im? If—"

A sudden scuffle in the dark, a half-uttered, half-suppressed cry, and the sound of flesh colliding violently with flesh cut him off.

"Here's a bird I found layin' low acrost th' street, sir," Officer Hornsby reported, emerging from the darkness which surrounded us, forcing an undersized individual before him. One of his hands was firmly twisted

in the prisoner's collar, the other was clamped across his mouth, preventing outcry.

"I left th' gang in th' car up by th' entrance to th' alley," he continued, "an' come gum-shoein' down to see if I wuz needed, an' this gink must 'a' seen me buttons, for he made a pass at me an' missed, then started to let out a squawk, but I choked 'im off. Looks like he wuz planted as a lookout for th' gang, an—"

"Ah?" de Grandin interrupted. "I think the answer to your question is here, my sergeant." To Hornsby: "You say that he attempted an assault?"

"I'll tell th' cock-eyed world," the officer replied. "Here's what he tried to ease into me." From beneath his blouse he drew a short, curve-bladed dagger, some eight inches in length, its wicked keen-edged blade terminating in a vicious vulture's-beak hook. "I'd 'a' made a handsome-lookin' corpse wid that between me ribs," he added grimly.

De Grandin gazed upon the weapon, then the captive. "The dagger is from Kurdistan," he declared. "This one"—he turned his back contemptuously on the prisoner—"I think that he is Russian, a renegade Hebrew from the Black Sea country. I know his kind, willing to sell his ancient, honorable birthright and the god of his fathers for political preferment. What further did he do, if anything?"

"Well, sir, he kind of overreached his self when he drove at me wid th' knife—I reckon I must 'a' seen it comin', or *felt* it, kind of. Anyhow, he missed me, an' I cracked 'im on the wrist wid me nightstick, an' he dropped his sticker an' started to yell. Not on account o' the pain, sir—it warn't that sort o' yell—but more as if he wuz tryin' to give th' tip-off, to 'is pals. Then I claps me hand acrost 'is trap an' lets 'im have me knuckles. He flings sumpin—looked like a bunch o' keys, as near as I could make out—away an'—well, here we are, sir.

"What'll I do wid 'im, Sergeant?" He turned inquiringly to Costello.

"Put th' joolry on 'im an' slap 'im in th' wagon wid th' other guy," the sergeant answered.

"I got you," Hornsby replied, saluting and twisting his hand more tightly in the prisoner's collar. "Come on, bozo," he shook the captive by way of emphasis, "you an' me's goin' bye-bye."

"And now, my sergeant, for the strategy," de Grandin announced. "Renouard, Friend Trowbridge and I shall go ahead. Too many entering at once would surely advertise our coming. The doors are locked and that one threw away the keys. He had been well instructed. To

search for them would take up too much time, and time is what we cannot well afford to waste. Therefore you will await us here, and when I blow my whistle you will raid the place. And oh, my friend, do not delay your coming when I signal! Upon your speed may rest a little life. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sor," Costello answered. "But how're ye goin' to crack th' crib—git in th' joint, I mean?"

De Grandin grinned his elfish grin. "Is it not beautiful?" he asked, drawing something from the inside pocket of his sheepskin reefer. It was a long instrument of tempered steel, flattened at one end to a thin but exceedingly tough blade.

The Irishman took it in his hand and swung it to and fro, testing its weight and balance. "Bedad, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he said admiringly, "what an elegant burglar was spoilt when you decided to go straight!"

De Grandin motioned to Renouard and me, and crept along the base of the house wall. Arrived at a soiled window, he inserted the thin edge of his burglar tool between the upper and lower casings and probed and twisted it experimentally. The window had been latched, but a little play had been left between the sashes. Still, it took us but a moment to determine that the casings, though loose, were securely fastened.

"*Allons*," de Grandin murmured, and we crept to another window. This, too, defied his efforts, as did the next two which we tested, but success awaited us at our fifth trial. Persistence was rewarded, and the questing blade probed and pushed with gentle persuasion till the rusty latch snapped back and we were able to push up the sash.

Inside the storehouse all was darker than a cellar, but by the darting ray of de Grandin's flashlight we finally descried a flight of dusty stairs spiraling upward to a lightless void. We crept up these, found ourselves in a wide and totally empty loft, then, after casting about for a moment, found a second flight of stairs and proceeded to mount them.

"The trail is warm—*pardieu*, it is hot!" he murmured. "Come, my friends, forward, and for your lives, no noise!"

The stairway terminated in a little walled-off space, once used as a business office by the manufactory which had occupied the loft's main space, no doubt. Now it was hung with draperies of deep-red velours realistically embroidered with the figure of a strutting peacock some six or eight feet high. "Melek Taos—the Peacock Spirit of Evil, Satan's viceroy upon earth," de Grandin told us in a whisper as we gazed upon the image which his flashing searchlight showed. "Now do you stand close

beside me and have your weapons ready, if you please. We may have need of them."

Across the little intervening space he tiptoed, put aside the ruddy curtains and tapped timidly on the door thus disclosed. Silence answered his summons, but as he repeated the hail with soft insistence the door swung inward a few inches and a hooded figure peered cautiously through the opening.

"Who comes?" the sentinel whispered. "And why have ye not the mystic knock?"

"The knock, you say?" de Grandin answered almost soundlessly. "*Morbleu*, I damn think that we have one—do you care for it?" Swiftly he swung the steel tool with which he had forced the windows and caught the hooded porter fairly on the cranium.

"Assist me, if you please," he ordered in a whisper, catching the man as he toppled forward and easing him to the floor. "So. Off with his robe, while I insure his future harmlessness."

With the waist-cord from the porter's costume he bound the man's hands and ankles, then rose, donned the red cassock and tiptoed through the door.

"*Ss-s-st!*" His low, sharp hiss came through the dark, and we followed him into the tiny anteroom. A row of pegs was ranged around the wall, and from them hung hooded gowns of dark-red cloth, similar to that worn by the sentinel. Obedient to de Grandin's signaled order, Renouard and I arrayed ourselves in gowns, pulled the hoods well forward to obscure our features, and, hands clasped before us and demurely hidden in our flowing sleeves, crept silently across the vestibule, paused a moment at the swinging curtains muffling the door, then, with bowed heads, stepped forward in de Grandin's wake.

We were in the chapel of the Devil-Worshippers.*

14. *The Serpent's Lair*

HANGINGS OF DARK-RED STUFF draped loosely from the ceiling of the hall, obscuring doors and windows, their folds undulating eerily, like fluttering cerements of unclean phantoms. Candles like votive lights flickered in cups of red glass at intervals round the walls, their tiny, lambent flames diluting rather than dispelling the darkness which hovered like vapor in the air. Only in one spot was there light. At the

** Here Ended Part Three In The April 1932 Weird Tales.*

farther end of the draped room was an altar shaped in imitation of the Gothic sanctuary of a church, and round this blazed a mass of tall black candles which splashed a luminous pool on the deep red drugget covering the floor and altar-steps. Above the altar was set a crucifix, reversed, so that the thorn-crowned head was down, the nail-pierced feet above, and back of this a reredos of scarlet cloth was hung, the image of a strutting peacock appliqued on it in flashing sequins. On the table of the altar lay a long cushion of red velvet, tufted like a mattress. Two ranks of backless benches had been set transversely in the hall, a wide center aisle between them, smaller aisles to right and left, and on these the congregation sat in strained expectancy, each member muffled in a hooded gown so that it was impossible to distinguish the features, or even the sex, of a given individual.

A faint odor of incense permeated the close atmosphere; not sweet incense, such as churches use, but something with a bitter, pungent tang to it, and—it seemed to me—more than a hint of the subtle, maddening aroma of burnt cannabis, the *bhang* with which fanatics of the East intoxicate themselves before they run amok. But through the odor of the incense was another smell, the heavy smell of paraffin, as though some careless person had let fall an open tank of it, soaking the thick floor-covering before the error could be rectified.

Somewhere unseen to us, perhaps behind the faintly fluttering draperies on the walls, an organ was playing very softly as Renouard, de Grandin and I stole quickly through the curtained doorway of the anteroom and, unobserved, took places on the rearmost bench.

Here and there a member of the congregation gave vent to a soft sigh of suppressed anticipation and excitement, once or twice peaked cowls were bent together as their wearers talked in breathless whispers; but for the most part the assemblage sat erect in stony silence, motionless, yet eager as a flock of hooded vultures waiting for the kill which is to furnish them their feast.

An unseen gong chimed softly as we took our seats, its soft, resonant tones penetrating the dark room like a sudden shaft of daylight let into a long-closed cellar, and the congregation rose as one, standing with hands clasped before them and heads demurely bowed. A curtain by the altar was pushed back, and through the opening three figures glided. The first was tall and gaunt, with a Slavic type of face, wild, fantastic eyes and thick, fair hair; the second was young, still in his early twenties, with the lithe, free carriage, fiery glance and swarthy complexion of the nomadic races of southeastern Europe or western Asia. The third was a

small, frail, aged man—that is, he seemed so at first glance. A second look left doubt both of his frailty and age. His face was old, long, thin and deeply etched with wrinkles, hard-shaven like an actor's or a priest's and in it burned a pair of big, sad eyes—eyes like Lucifer's as he broods upon the high estate from which he fell. His mouth was tight-lipped, but very red, drooping at the corners, the mouth of an ascetic turned voluptuary. His body, in odd contrast to his face, seemed curiously youthful, erect and vigorous in carriage; a strange and somehow terrifying contrast, it seemed to me. All three were robed in gowns of scarlet fashioned like monks' habits, with hooded capes pendant at the back and knotted cords of black about the waist. On the breast of each was blazoned an inverted passion cross in black; each had a tonsure shaven on his head; each wore red-leather sandals on his feet.

A gentle rustling sounded as the trio stepped into the circle of light before the altar, a sighing of soft sighs as the audience gave vent to its pent-up emotion.

The old-young man moved quickly toward the altar, his two attendants at his elbows, sank to one knee before it in humble genuflection; then, like soldiers at command to wheel, they turned to face the congregation. The two attendants folded hands before them, bringing the loose cuffs of their sleeves together; the other advanced a pace, raised his left hand as though in benediction and murmured: "*Gloria tibi, Lucifer!*"

"*Gloria tibi, Lucifer!*" intoned the congregation in a low-voiced chant.

"Praise we now our Lord the Peacock, Melek Taos, Angel Peacock of our Lord the Prince of Darkness!" came the chanted invocation of the red priest.

"Hail and glory, laud and honor, O our Lord, great Melek Taos!" responded the auditors.

"Let us not forget the Serpent, who aforetime in the Garden undertook the Master's bidding and from bondage to the Tyrant freed our parents, Eve and Adam!" the red priest admonished.

"Hail thee, Serpent, who aforetime in the Garden men call Eden, from the bondage of the Tyrant freed our parents Eve and Adam!" cried the congregation, a wave of fervor running through them like fire among the withered grass in autumn.

The red priest and his acolytes wheeled sharply to the left and marched beyond the limits of the lighted semicircle made by the altar candles, and suddenly the hidden organ, which had been playing a sort of soft improvisation, changed its tune. Now it sang a slow andante strain,

rising and falling with persistent, pulsating quavers like the almost tuneless airs which Eastern fakirs play upon their pipes when the serpents rise to "dance" upon their tails.

And as the tremulous melody burst forth the curtains parted once again and a girl ran out into the zone of candlelight. For a moment she poised on tiptoe, and a gasp of savage and incredulous delight came from the company. Very lovely she was, violet-eyed, daffodil-haired, with a body white as petals of narcissi dancing in the wind. Her costume gleamed and glittered in the flickering candlelight, encasing her slim frame from hips to armpits like a coiled green hawser. It was a fifteen-foot live boa constrictor!

As she moved lithely through the figures of her slow, gliding dance to the sensuous accompaniment of the organ, the great reptile loosed its hold upon her torso and waved its hedeous, wedge-shaped head back and forth in perfect time. Its glistening, scaly head caressed her cheek, its lambent forked tongue shot forth to meet her red, voluptuous mouth.

Gradually the wailing minor of the organ began to quicken. The girl spun round and round upon her toes, and with that odd trick which we have of noting useless trifles at such times, I saw that the nails of her feet had been varnished to a gleaming pink, like the nails of a hand, and as she danced they cast back twinkling coral-toned reflections of the candles' flames. The great snake seemed to waken. Silently, swiftly, its sleek body extended, flowing like a stream of molten green metal about the girl, slithering from her bare white breast to her bare white feet, then knotting once again about her hips and waist like a gleaming girdle of death. Round and round she whirled like a lovely animated top, her grisly partner holding her in firm embrace. Finally, as the music slowed once more, she fell exhausted to the carpet, and the snake again entwined itself about her body, its devilish head raised above her heaving shoulders, its beady eyes and flickering tongue shooting silent challenge to the world to take her from it.

The music still whined on with insistent monotone, and the girl rose slowly to her knees, bowed to the altar till her forehead touched the floor and signed herself with the cross—in reverse, beginning at her breast and ending at her brow. Then, tottering wearily beneath the burden of the great snake's weight, she staggered through the opening between the swaying curtains.

The organ's wailing ceased, and from the shadow-shrouded rear of the hall there came the low intoning of a chant. The music was Gregorian, but the words were indistinguishable. Then came the high, sweet

chiming of a sacring bell, and all the audience fell down upon their knees, heads bowed, hands clasped, as a solemn, robed procession filed up the aisle.

First marched the crucifer, arrayed in scarlet cassock and white surplice and what a crucifix he bore! The rood was in reverse, the *corpus* hung head-downward, and at the staff-head perched the image of a strutting peacock, its silver overlaid with bright enamel, simulating the natural gaudy colors of the bird. Next came two men in crimson cassocks, each with a tall black candle flickering in his hand, and then a man who bore a staff of silver bells, which chimed and tinkled musically. Two other surpliced acolytes came next, walking slowly backward and swinging censers which belched forth clouds of pungent smoke. Finally the red priest, now clothed in full canonicals, chasuble, alb and amice, while at his elbows walked his two attendants in the dalmatic and tunicle of deacon and sub-deacon.

Two by two behind the men there came a column of girls garbed in a sort of conventual habit—long, loose-cuffed sleeves, full skirts reaching to the ankle, high, cope-like collars—all of brilliant scarlet embroidered with bright orange figures which waved like flickering flames as the garments swayed. The gowns were belted at the waist, but open at the throat, leaving chest and bust uncovered and disclosing on each breast the same symbol we had seen on Abigail Kimble's white flesh. Upon their heads they wore tall caps of stiff red linen, shaped somewhat like a bishop's miter and surmounted by the silver image of a peacock. As they walked sedately in the wake of the red priest their bare white feet showed with startling contrast to the deep red of their habits and the dark tones of the carpet.

A brazen pot of glowing charcoal was swung from a long rod borne by the first two women, while the next two carried cushions of red plush on which there lay some instruments of gleaming metal. The final members of the column were armed with scarlet staves which they held together at the tips, forming a sort of open arbor over a slight figure swathed in veils which marched with slow and flustering steps.

"*Morbleu*," de Grandin whispered in my ear, "*une proselyte!* Can such things be?"

His surmise was correct. Before the altar the procession halted, spread out fanwise, with the veiled girl in their midst. The women set their fire-pot on the altar steps and blew upon the embers with a bellows till they glowed with sudden life. Then into the red nest of coals they put the

shining instruments and stood back, waiting, a sort of awful eagerness upon their faces.

"Do what thou wilt; this shall be the whole of the law!" the red priest chanted.

"Love is the law; love free and unbound," the congregation intoned.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the law," the priest repeated; "therefore be ye goodly, dress ye in all fine raiment, eat rich foods and drink sweet wines, even wines that foam. Also take thy fill of love, when and with whom ye will. Do what thou wilt; this is the law."

The women gathered round the kneeling convert, screening her from view, as the red priest called:

"Is not this better than the death-in-life of slaves who serve the Slave-God and go oppressed with consciousness of sin, vainly striving after tedious virtues? *There is no sin*—do what thou wilt; that is the law!"

The red-robed women started back and left the space before the altar open. In the candle-lighted clearing, the altarlights reflected in the jewels which glimmered in her braided hair, knelt the convert, stripped of her enshrouding veils, clad only in her own white beauty. The red priest turned, took something from the glowing fire-pot—

A short, half-strangled exclamation broke from the kneeling girl as she half started to her feet, but three watchful red-robed women sprang upon her, seized her wrist and head, and held her rigid while the priest pressed the glowing branding-iron tight against her breast, then with a deftness which denoted practise, took a second tool and forced it first against one cheek, then the other.

The branded girl groaned and writhed within her guardians' grasp, but they held her firmly till the ordeal was finished, then raised her, half fainting to her feet and put a crimson robe on her, a yellow sash about her waist and a crimson miter on her head.

"Scarlet Women of the Apocalypse, behold your sister—Scarlet Woman, you who have put behind you consciousness of right and wrong, look on the others of your sisterhood!" the red priest cried. "Show them the sign, that all may know that which ye truly are!"

Now pride, perhaps the consciousness that all connection with religious teaching had been cut, seemed to revive the almost swooning girl. Though tears still glinted on her eyelids from the torment she had undergone, a wild, bold recklessness shone in her handsome face as she stood forth before the other wearers of the brand and proudly, like a queen, drew back her ruddy robe, displaying the indelible signs of evil stamped upon her flesh. Her chin was raised, her eyes glowed through their tears with

haughty pride as she revealed the symbols of her covenant with hell.

The little silver bells burst forth into a peal of admonition. Priest and people dropped upon their knees as the curtains by the altar were drawn back and another figure stepped into the zone of candlelight.

Slowly, listlessly, almost like one walking in a dream, she stepped. A long and sleeveless smock of yellow satin, thickset with red figures of dancing demons, hung loosely from her shoulders. A sort of ureus fashioned like a peacock was set crown-like on her head, rings set with fiery gems glowed on every toe and finger, great ruby pendants dangled from her ears. She seemed a very Queen in Babylon as she proceeded to the altar between the ranks of groveling priests and women and sank to her knees, then rose and signed herself with the cross, beginning at the breast and ending at the brow.

A whispered ripple which became a wave ran rapidly from lip to lip: "It's she; the Queen, the Prophetess, the Bride-Elect! She has graced us with her presence!"

De Grandin murmured something in my ear, but I did not hear him. My other senses seemed paralyzed as my gaze held with unbelieving horror to the woman standing at the altar. The Queen—the Devil's Bride-Elect—was Alice Hume.

15. The Mass of St. Secatre

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SACRILEGIOUS SACRAMENT had been carefully rehearsed. For a long moment Alice stood erect before the altar, head bowed, hands clasped beneath her chin; then parting her hands and raising them palm-forward to the level of her temples, she dropped as though forced downward by invincible pressure, and we heard the softly thudding impact as she flung herself prostrate and beat her brow and palms against the crimson altar-carpet in utter self-abasement.

"Is all prepared?" the red priest called as, flanked by deacon and sub-deacon, he paused before the altar steps.

"Not yet; we make the sanctuary ready!" two of the scarlet-robed women returned in chorus as they stepped forward, bent and raised Alice Hume between them. Quickly, like skilled tiring women working at their trade, they lifted off her yellow robe with its decorations of gyrating devils, drew the glinting ruby rings from her toes and fingers, unhooked the flashing pendants from the holes bored through her ears. Then they unloosed her hair, and as the cloven tide of silken tresses rippled down, took her by the hands and led her slowly up the stair-

way to the altar. There one of them crouched to the floor, forming herself into a living stepping-stone, while, assisted by the other, Alice trod upon her back, mounted to the altar and laid her white form supine on the long, red cushion. Then, ankles crossed and hands with upturned palms laid flaccidly beside her, she closed her eyes and lay as still as any carven statue. They put the sacred vessels on her breast, the golden chalice thick-inlaid with gems, the heavy, hand-chased paten with its freight of small, red wafers, and the yellow plate shone brightly in the candle-light, its reflection casting halos of pale gold upon the ivory flesh.

The red priest mounted quickly to the altar, genuflected with his back to it, and called out: "*Introibo ad altare Dei*—I will go up into the altar of God."

Rapidly the rite proceeded. The fifty-second Psalm—*quid gloriaris*—was said, but blasphemously garbled, God's name deleted and the Devil's substituted, so that it read: "Why boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou canst do mischief, whereas the evilness of Satan endureth yet daily?"

Then came confession, and, as *oremus te Domine* was intoned the priest bowed and kissed the living altar as provided by the rubric. Again, repeating *Dominus vobiscum*, he pressed a burning kiss upon the shrinking flesh.

The subdeacon took a massive black-bound book and bore it to the deacon, who swung the censer over it; then, while the other held it up before him, he read aloud:

"In the beginning God created seven spirits as a man lighteth one lamp from another, and of these Lucifer, whose true name is forbidden to pronounce, was chiefest. But he, offended by the way in which God treated His creations, rebelled against the Tyrant, but by treachery was overthrown.

"Therefore was he expelled from heaven, but seized dominion of the earth and air, which he retaineth to this day. And those who worship him and do him honor will have the joys of life all multiplied to them, and at the last shall dwell with him in that eternal place which is his own, where they shall have dominion over hosts of demons pledged to do their will.

"Choose ye, therefore, man; choose ye whether ye will have the things of earth added to an endless authority in hell, or whether ye will submit to the will of the Tyrant of the Skies, have sorrow upon earth and everlasting slavery in the world to come."

The deacon and subdeacon put the book aside, crossing themselves

in reverse, and the call came mockingly: "May our sins be multiplied through the words contained in this Gospel."

The red priest raised the paten high above the living altar, intoning: "*Suscipe sancte Pater hanc immaculatam hostiam*—"

De Grandin fumbled underneath his robe. "Renouard, my friend," he whispered, "do you go tell the good Costello to come quickly. These cursed curtains round the walls, I fear they will shut in my whistle's sound, and we must have aid at once. Quickly, my friend, a life depends on it!"

Renouard slipped from his place and crept toward the door, put back the curtain with a stealthy hand, and started back dismayed. Across the doorway we had entered a barrier was drawn, an iron guard-door intended to hold back flames should the building catch afire.

What had occurred was obvious. Recovered from the blow de Grandin dealt him the seneschal had struggled from his bonds and barred the portal, then—could it be possible that he had gone unseen behind the screen of curtains hanging from the walls and warned the others of our presence?

De Grandin and Renouard reached for their firearms, fumbling with the unfamiliar folds of their disguises . . .

Before a weapon could be drawn we were assaulted from behind, our elbows pinioned to our sides, lengths of coiling cords wound tightly around our bodies. In less than half a minute we were helpless, firmly bound and set once more in our places on the bench. Silently and swiftly as a serpent twines its coils about a luckless rabbit our assailants did their work, and only they and we, apparently, knew what occurred. Certainly the hellish ritual at the altar never faltered, nor did a member of the congregation turn round to see what passed behind.

Two women of the Scarlet Sisterhood had crept back of the curtains by the altar. Now they emerged, bearing between them a little, struggling boy, a naked, chubby little fellow who fought and kicked and offered such resistance as his puny strength allowed and called out to his "Daddy" and his "Mamma" to save him from his captors.

Down on the altar steps they flung the little boy; one woman seized his little, dimpled hands, the other took his feet, extending his small body to its greatest length. The deacon and subdeacon had stepped forward. . . .

I shut my eyes and bowed my head, but my ears I could not stop, and so, I heard the red priest chant: "*Hic est enim calix sanguinis mea*—this is the chalice of my blood—" I smelled the perfume of the incense, strong, acrid, sweet yet bitterly revolting, mounting to my brain like

some accursed Oriental drug; I heard the wail which slowly grew in volume, yet which had a curiously muffled quality about it, the wail which ended in a little strangling, suffocated bleat!

I knew! Though not a Catholic, I had attended mass with Catholic friends too often not to know. The priest had said the sacred words of intention, and in a church the deacon would pour wine, the subdeacon water in the chalice. But this was not a church; this was a temple dedicated to the Devil, and mingled with the red wine was no water. . . . A bitter memory of my childhood hurried back across the year: They'd given me a lamb when I was five years old, all summer I had made a pet of it, I loved the gentle, woolly thing. The autumn came, and with it came the time for slaughter . . . that agonizing, strangling bleat! That blood-choked cry of utter anguish!

Another sound cut in. The red priest once again was chanting, this time in a language which I could not understand, a ringing, sonorous tongue, yet with something wrong about it. Syllables which should have been noble in their cadences were clipped and twisted in their endings.

And now *another voice*—an abominably guttural voice with a note of hellish chuckling laughter in it—was answering the priest, still in that unknown tongue. It rose and fell, gurgled and chuckled obscenely, and though its volume was not great it seemed to fill the place as rumbling thunder fills the summer sky. Sweat broke out on my forehead. Luckily for me I had been seated by my captors; otherwise I should have fallen where I stood. As surely as I knew my heart was hammering against my ribs, I knew the voice of incarnate evil was speaking in that curtained room—with my own ears I heard the Devil answering his votary!

Two red-robed priestesses advanced, one from either side of the altar. Each bore an ewer of heavy hammered brass, and even in the candles' changing light I saw the figures on the vessels were of revolting nastiness, beasts, men and women in attitudes of unspeakable obscenity. The deacon and subdeacon took the vessels from the women's hands and knelt before the priest, who dropped upon his knees with outspread hands and upturned face a moment, then rose and took the chalice from the human altar's gently heaving breast and held it out before him as a third red nun came forward, bearing in her outstretched hands a queer, teapot-like silver vessel.

I say a teapot, for that is what it most resembled when I saw it first. Actually, it was a pitcher made of silver, very brightly polished, shaped to represent a strutting peacock with fanned-out tail and erected crest, its neck outstretched. The bird's beak formed the spout of the strange pitcher,

and a funnel-shaped opening in the back between the wings permitted liquids to be poured into it.

The contents of the chalice, augmented and diluted by ruby liquors from the ewers which the women brought, were poured into the peacock-pitcher—a quart or so, I estimated—and the red priest flung the chalice by contemptuously and raised the new container high above his head, so that its polished sides and ruby eyes flung back the altar candles' lights in myriad darting rays.

"Vile, detestable wretches—miscreants!" de Grandin whispered hoarsely. "They mingled blood of innocents, my friends; the wine which represents *le précieux sang de Dieu* and the lifeblood of that little baby boy whose throat they cut and drained a moment hence! *Parbleu*, they shall pay through the nose for this if Jules de Grandin—"

The red priest's deep voice boomed an invitation: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of all your good deeds, and intend to lead a new life of wickedness, draw nigh and take this unholy sacrament to your souls' damnation, devoutly kneeling!"

The congregation rose and ranged themselves upon their knees in a semi-circle round the altar. From each to each the red priest strode, thrusting the peacock's hollow beak into each opened mouth, decanting mingled wine and blood.

"You see?" de Grandin's almost soundless whisper came to me. "They study to give insult to the end. They make the cross-sign in reverse, the crucifix they have turned upside-down; when they administer their sacrament of hell they give the wine before the wafer, mocking both the Anglican and Latin rites. *Saligauds!*"

The ceremony proceeded to "*ite missa est*," when the celebrant suddenly seized a handful of red, triangular wafers from the paten and flung them broadcast out upon the floor. Pandemonium best describes the scene that followed. Those who have seen a group of urchins scrambling for coins tossed by some prankish tourist can vision how that audience of gowned and hooded worshippers of Satan clawed and fought for fragments of the host, groveled on the floor, snatching, scratching, grasping for the smallest morsel of the wafer, which, when obtained, they popped into their mouths and chewed with noisy mastication, then spat forth with exclamations of disgust and cries of foul insult.

As the guards who stood behind us joined the swinish scramble for the desecrated host, de Grandin suddenly lurched forward, hunched his shoulders, then straightened like a coiling spring released from tension.

Supple as an eel—and as muscular—he needed but the opportunity to wriggle from the ligatures which lashed his elbows to his sides.

"Quick, my friends, the haste!" he whispered, drawing his sharp Gurkha knife and slashing at our bonds. "We must—"

"*Les gendarmes*—the police!"

The fire-door leading to the anteroom banged back as the hooded warder rushed into the hall, screaming his warnings. He turned, slammed the door behind him, then drew a heavy chain across it, snapping a padlock through its links. "They come—*les gendarmes*!" herepeated hysterically.

The red priest barked a sharp command, and like sailors trained to spring to quarters when the bugles sound alarm, some half-dozen Satanists rushed to the walls; upset the guttering votive lamps, then scuttled toward the altar. Their companions already had disappeared behind the curtains hanging round the shrine.

"*Qui est*—" Renouard began, but de Grandin cut him short.

"Quickly, for your lives!" he cried, seizing us by the elbows and forcing us before him.

Now we understood the heavy, sickening smell of kerosene which hovered in the room. From top to hem the shrouding curtains at the walls were soaked in it, requiring but the touch of fire to burst into inextinguishable flame. Already they were blazing fiercely where the upset lamps had lighted them, and the heavy, suffocating smoke of burning oil was spreading like mephitic vapor through the room. In a moment the place would be a raging hell of fire.

Beyond the heavy fire-door we heard Costello's peremptory hail: "Open up here; open in th' law's name, or we'll break th' door!" Then the thunder of nightsticks on the steel-sheathed panels, finally the trap-drum staccato of machine-gun bullets rattling on the metal barricade.

Too late to look for help that way, we knew. The door was latched and bolted, and barred with a locked chain, and a geyser of live flame was spurting upward round it, for the wooden walls were now ablaze, outlining the fire-proof door in a frame of death.

Now the oil-soaked carpet had begun to burn; red tongues of flame and curling snakes of smoke were darting hungrily about our feet.

"On!" cried de Grandin, "it is the only way! They must have planned this method of defense in case of raid; surely they have left a rat-hole for their own escape!"

His guess seemed right, for only round the altar were the flames held back, though even there they were beginning to make progress.

Sleeves held before our faces for such poor protection as they gave, we stumbled toward the altar through the choking smoke. A big, cowed man rose out of nowhere in my path and aimed a blow at me. Scarce knowing what I did I struck at him, felt the sharp point of my hunting-knife sink into the soft flesh of his axilla, felt the warm blood spurt upon my hand as his artery was severed, and—rushed on. I was no longer Samuel Trowbridge, staid, middle-aged practitioner of medicine. I was not even a man, I was a snarling, elemental beast, alive to only one desire, to save myself at any cost; to butcher anything that barred my path.

We lurched and stumbled up the stairway leading to the altar, for there the smoke was somewhat thinner, the flames a trifle less intense. "*Succes,*" de Grandin cried, "the way lies here, my friends—this is the exit from their *sacre* burrow! Follow on; I can already see—

"*Qui diable?*" He started back, his pistol flashing in the firelight.

Behind the altar, looming dimly through the swirling smoke, a man's shape bulked. One glance identified him. It was the big, young, white-haired man Costello had knocked unconscious to save Renouard an hour or so before.

In his arms he held the fainting form of Alice Hume.

16. Framed

"Hands up!" de Grandin barked. "Elevate your hands, or—"

"Don't be an utter ass," the other advised tartly. "Can't you see my hands are full?" Displaying no more respect for the Frenchman's pistol than if it had been a pointed finger, he turned on his heel, then flung across his shoulder as a sort of afterthought, "if you want to save your hides a scorching you'd best be coming this way. There's a stairway here—at least, there was fifteen minutes ago."

"*Fanons d'un corbeau*, he is cool, this one!" de Grandin muttered with grudging admiration, treading close upon the stranger's heels.

Sandwiched between our building and the next was a narrow, spiral stairway, a type of covered fire escape long since declared illegal by the city. Down this the stranger led us, de Grandin close behind him, his pistol ready, his flashlight playing steadily on the other's back. "One false step and I fire," he warned as we descended the dark staircase.

"Oh be quiet," snapped our guide. "One false step and I'll break my silly neck! Don't talk so much, you make me nervous."

Two paces ahead of us, he paused at the stairway's bottom, kicked

a metal fire-door open, then drew aside to let us pass. We found ourselves in a narrow alleyway, darker than a moonless midnight, but with a single feeble spot of light diluting the blackness at its farther end, where the weak rays of a flickering gas street lamp battled with the gloom.

"Now what?" the little Frenchman asked. "Why do we stand here like a flock of silly sheep afraid to enter through a gate? Why—"

"*S-s-st!*" our guide's sharp hiss shut him off. "I think they're waiting for us over there, they—*ha?* I knew it!"

The faintly glowing reflection of the street lamp's light was shut off momentarily as a man's form bulked in the alley exit.

De Grandin tapped me on the arm. "*Elle est nue*—she has no protection from the chill," he whispered with a nod toward Alice. "Will you not put your robe upon her? I shall require mine for disguise a little longer, or—"

"All right," I answered, slipping off my scarlet cassock and draping it about the girl's nude loveliness while the man who held her in his arms assisted me with quick, deft hands.

"Dimitri—Franz?" a voice called cautiously from the alley entrance. "Are you there? Have you brought the Bride?"

For a moment we were silent, then: "Yes," our companion answered thickly, as though he spoke with something in his mouth, "she's here, but—"

His answer broke abruptly, and I felt rather than saw him shift the girl's weight to his left arm as he fumbled under his coat with his right hand.

"But what?" the hail came sharply. "Is she injured? You know the penalty if harm comes to her. Come here!"

"Here, take her," the stranger whispered, thrusting Alice into my arms. To de Grandin: "How about that pistol you've been so jolly anxious to shoot off; got it ready?"

"*Certainement. Et puis?*" the Frenchman answered.

"All right; look lively—this way!"

Silently as shadows the three of them, de Grandin, the stranger and Renouard, crept down the alley, leaving me to follow with the fainting girl as best I could.

Just inside the entrance to the passageway the stranger spoke again: "The Bride is safe, but—" Once more his thick speech halted; then, "Franz is hurt; he can not walk well, and—"

"Then kill him, and be quick!" the sharp command came back.



"He dragged him back to the shelters of the passageway's arched entrance."

"None must fall into their hands alive. Quick; shoot him, and bring the Bride; the car is waiting!"

A muffled shot sounded, followed by a groan, then: "Bring the Prophetess at once!" came the angry command. "What are you waiting for—"

"Only for you, old thing!" With a booming shout of mingled exultation and hilarity, the strange man leaped suddenly from the shadow of the alley's mouth, seized his interrogator in his arms and dragged him back to the shelter of the passageway's arched entrance.

"Hold him. Frenchy!" he commanded. "Don't let him get away; he's—"

A spurting dart of flame stabbed through the darkness and a sharp report was followed by the viscous *whin-ning!* of a ricocheting bullet which glanced from the vaulted roof and whined past me in the dark.

I crouched to the cement pavement, involuntarily putting myself between the firing and the girl in my arms. A second report sounded, like an echo of the first, followed by a screaming cry which ended in a choking groan, then the sound of running feet.

"That's one who'll never slit another throat," the stranger remarked casually.

I waited for a moment, then, as there seemed no further danger to my unconscious charge, rose and joined the others. "What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, as we were escaping from the fire up there this poor fellow came to help us, and this other one shot him," the unknown man replied coolly. "Rankest piece of cold-blooded murder I ever saw. Positively revoltin'. Eh, Frenchy?"

"But certainly," de Grandin agreed. "He shot the noble fellow down *a'froid*. Oh, yes; I saw it with my own two eyes."

"I, too," Renouard supplemented.

"Are you crazy?" I demanded. "I saw one of you grapple with this man, then when the other shot at you, you returned his fire, and—"

A kick which nearly broke my tibia was delivered to my shin. "*Ah bah*, how could you see, my friend?" de Grandin asked me almost angrily. "You were back there with Mademoiselle Alice, and the night is dark. I tell you this so estimable, noble fellow would have aided us, had not this vile miscreant assassinated him. He would have killed us, too—all three of us—had not *Monsteu*—er—this gentleman, gallantly gone forth and pulled him down with his bare hands at peril of his life. Yes, of course. That is how it was. See, here is the weapon with which the wicked murder was committed."

"Right-o, and ain't it unfortunate that it's a German gun?" the stranger added. "They'll never be able to trace it by its serial number, now. However, we're all eye-witnesses to the crime, and any ballistics expert will be able to match the bullet and the gun. So—"

"But you fired that shot!" I accused.

"I?" his tone was pregnant with injured innocence. "Why, I didn't have a weapon—"

"*Mais certainement*," de Grandin chimed in eagerly, "the sergeant took his weapon from him when they had their so unfortunate misunderstanding in the street." In a fierce whisper he added: "Learn to hold your tongue in matters not concerning you, my friend. *Regardez!*" He turned his flashlight full upon the prisoner's face.

It was the red priest.

The bellowing halloo of a fire engine's siren sounded from the other street, followed by the furious clanging of a gong. "Come," de Grandin ordered, "the fire brigade has come to fight the flames, and we must find Costello. I hope the noble fellow came to no harm as he tried to rescue us."

"Glory be, Doctor de Grandin, sor!" Costello cried as we rounded the corner and returned to the street from which we had entered the devil-worshippers' temple an hour or so earlier. "We waited for ye till we figgered ye'd been unable to signal, then went in to git ye; but th' murtherin' divils had barred th' door an' set th' place afire—be gob, I thought ye'd 'a' been cremated before this?"

"Not I," de Grandin answered with a chuckle. "It is far from so, I do assure you. But see, we have not come back empty-handed. Here, safe in good friend Trowbridge's arms, is she whom we did seek, and here"—he pointed to the red priest who struggled futilely in the big stranger's grasp—"here is one I wish you to lock up immediately. The charge is murder. Renouard and I, as well as this gentleman, will testify against him"

"Howly Moses! Who the divil let *you* out?" the sergeant demanded, as he caught sight of our strange ally. "I thought they put the bracelets on ye, an'—"

"They did," the other interrupted with a grin, "but I didn't think such jewelry was becoming to my special brand of homeliness, so I slipped 'em off and went to take a walk—"

"Oh, ye did, eh? Well, young felly, me lad, ye can be afther walkin' right, straight back, or—"

"But no!" de Grandin cut in quickly. "I shall be responsible for him, my sergeant. He is a noble fellow. It was he who guided us from the burning building, and at the great peril of his life seized this wicked one and wrenched his pistol from him when he would have killed us. Oh, yes; I can most confidently vouch for him.

"Come to Doctor Trowbridge's when you have put that so wicked man all safely in the jail," he added as we made off toward my car. "We shall have much to tell you."

"But it was the only way, *mon vieux*," de Grandin patiently explained as we drove homeward. "Their strategy was perfect—or almost so. But for good luck and this so admirable young man, we should have lost them altogether. Consider: When they set fire to that old building it burned like tinder; even now the fire brigade fights in vain to save it.

With it will be utterly destroyed all evidences of their vile crimes, the paraphernalia of their secret worship—even the bones of their little victims.

"When their leader fell into our hands we had no single shred of evidence to hold him; he had simply to deny all we said, and the authorities must let him go, for where was proof of what he did? Nowhere, *parbleu*—it was burned up! Of course. But circumstances so fell out that we killed one of his companions. *Voilà*, our chance had come! We had been wooden-heads not to have grasped it. So we conspire to forswear his life. As the good Costello would express it, we have put the frame around him. It is illegal, I admit, yet it is justice. You yourself know he did slay a little baby boy, yet you know we can not prove he did it; for none of us beheld the little corpse, and it is now but a pile of ashes mixed with other ashes. How many more like it there may be we do not surely know, but from what poor Mademoiselle Abigail told us, we know of one, at least.

"And must they die all unavenged? Must we stand by and see that spawn of hell, that devil's priest go free because as the lawyers say, the *corpus delicti* of his crimes can not be established for want of the small corpses? *Non, cordieu*, I say it shall not be! While he may not suffer legally for the murders which he did, the law has seized him—and *pardieu*, the law will punish him for a crime he did not do. It may not be the law, my friend; but it is justice. Surely, you agree?"

"I suppose so," I replied, "but somehow it doesn't seem—"

"Of course it does," he broke in smilingly, as though a simple matter had been settled. "Our next great task is to revive Mademoiselle Alice, make her as comfortable as may be, then notify her grieving fiancé that she is found. *Parbleu*, it will be like a tonic to see that young man's face when we inform him we have found her!"

17. "Hyt"

Alice was regaining consciousness as de Grandin and I carried her upstairs and laid her on the guest-room bed. More accurately, she was no longer in a state of actual swoon, for her eyes were open, but her whole being seemed submerged in a state of lethargy so profound that she was scarcely able to move her eyes and gaze incuriously about the room.

Mademoiselle, de Grandin, whispered soothingly, "you are with friends. Nothing can harm you now. No one may order you to do that which you do not wish to do. You are safe."

"Safe," the girl repeated. It was not a query, not an assertion; merely a repetition, parrotwise, of de Grandin's final word.

She gazed at us with fixed, unquestioning eyes, like a newborn infant, or an imbecile. Her face was blank as an unwritten sheet.

The little Frenchman gave her a quick, sharp glance, half surprised, half speculative. "But certainly," he answered. "You know us, do you not? We are your friends, Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin."

"Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin." Again that odd, phonographic repetition, incurious, disinterested, mechanical, meaningless.

She lay before us on the bed, still as she had lain upon the devil's altar, only the gentle motion of her breast and the half-light in her eyes telling us she was alive at all.

The Frenchman put his hand out and brushed the hair back from her cheeks, exposing her ears. Both lobes had been bored to receive the golden loops of the earrings she had worn, and the holes pierced through the flesh were large enough to accommodate moderately thick knitting-needles; yet the surrounding tissue was not inflamed, nor, save for a slight redness, was there any sign of granulation round the wounds. "Electrocautery," he told me softly. "They are modern in their methods, those ones, at any rate. Observe here, also, if you please—"

Following his tracing forefinger with my eyes, I saw a row of small, deep-pitted punctures in the white skin of her forearms. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Morphine? Why, there are dozens of incisions! They must have given her enough to—"

He raised his hand for silence, gazing intently at the girl's expressionless, immobile face.

"*Mademoiselle*," he ordered sharply, "on the table yonder you will find matches. Rise, go to them, take one and light it; then hold your finger in the flame while you count three. When that is done, you may come back to bed. *Allez!*"

She turned her oddly lifeless gaze on him as he pronounced his orders. Somehow, it seemed to me, reflected in her eyes his commands were like writing appearing supernaturally, a spirit-message on a medium's blank slate. Recorded, somehow, in her intelligence—or, rather, perceptively.—they in nowise altered the paper-blankness of her face.

Docilely, mechanically and unquestioningly, like one who walks in sleep, she rose from the bed, paced slowly across the room, took up the tray of matches and struck one.

"Hold!" de Grandin cried abruptly as she thrust her finger in the flame, but the order came a thought too late.

"One," she counted deliberately as the cruel fire licked her ivory hand, then obedient to his latest order, removed her finger, already beginning to glow angry-red with exposure to the flame, blew out the match, turned slowly, and retraced her steps. Not by a word or inarticulate expression, not even by involuntary wincing, did she betray rebellion at his orders or consciousness of the sharp pain she must have felt.

"No, my friend," he turned to me, as though answering an unspoken question, "it was not morphine—then. But it must be so now. Quick, prepare and give a hypodermic of three-quarters of a grain as soon as is convenient. In that way she will sleep, and not be able to respond to orders such as mine—or worse."

Wonderingly I mixed the opiate and administered it, and de Grandin prepared a soothing unguent to bandage her burned finger. "It was heroic treatment," he apologized as he wound the surgical gauze deftly round her hand, "but something drastic was required to substantiate my theory. Otherwise I could not have rested."

"How do you mean?" I asked curiously.

"Tell me, my friend," he answered irrelevantly, fixing me with his level, unwinking stare, "have not you a feeling—have not you felt that Mademoiselle Alice, whatever might have been her provocation, was at least in some way partly guilty with those murderers who killed the little helpless babes in Satan's worship? Have not you—"

"Yes!" I interrupted. "I *did* feel so, although I hesitated to express it. You see, I've known her all her life, and was very fond of her, but—well, it seemed to me that though she were in fear of death, or even torture, the calm way in which she accepted everything, even the murder of that helpless child—confound it, that got under my skin! When we think how poor Abigail Kimble sacrificed her life rather than endure the sight of such a heartless crime, I can't help but compare the way Alice has taken everything, and—"

"*Precisement*," he broke in with a laugh. "I, too, felt so, and so I did experiment to prove that we were wrong. Mademoiselle Abigail—the good God rest her soul!—was herself, in full possession of her faculties, while Mademoiselle Alice was the victim of *scopolamin apomophia*."

"*Scopolamin apomophia*?" I repeated blankly.

"*Mars certatnemet*; I am sure of it."

"Isn't that the so-called 'truth serum'?"

"*Precisement*."

"But I thought that had been discredited as a medical imposture—"

"For the purpose for which it was originally advertised; yes," he agreed. "Originally it was claimed that it could lead a criminal to confess his crimes when questioned by the officers, and in that it failed, but only because of its mechanical limitations.

"*Scopolamin apomophia* has a tendency so to throw the nervous system out of gear that it greatly lessens what we call the inhibitions, tearing down the warning signs which nature puts along the road of action. Subjected to its action, the criminal's caution, that cunning which warns him to refrain from talking lest he betray himself, is greatly lessened, for his volition is practically nullified. But that is not enough. No. Under *scopolamin apomophia*, if the injection be strong enough, he will repeat what is said to him, but that is not 'confession' as the law demands it. It is but parroting the accusation of the officers. So it has been discredited for judicial use.

"But for the purpose which those evil ones desired it was perfect. With a large dose of *scopolamin apomophia* injected in her veins, Made-moiselle Alice became their unresisting tool. She had no will nor wish nor consciousness except as they desired. Her mind was but a waxen record on which they wrote directions, and as the record reproduces words when placed upon the phonograph, so she reacted blindly to their orders.

"*Par exemple*: They dose her with the serum of *scopolamin apomophia*. They say to her, 'You will array yourself in such a way, and when the word is given you will stand thus before the altar, you will abase yourself in this wise, you will cross yourself so. Then you will permit the women to disrobe you until you stand all nude before the people; but you will not feel embarrassed. No. You will thereon mount the altar and lay yourself upon it as it were a bed and stay there till we bid you rise.'

"And as they have commanded, so she does. Did you not note the similarity of her walk and general bearing when she crossed the room a moment hence and when she stood before the altar of the devil?"

"Yes," I agreed, "I did."

"*Tres bon*. I thought as much. Therefore, when I saw those marks upon her arms and recognized them as the trail of hypodermic needles, I said to me: 'Jules de Grandin, it are highly probable that *scopolamin apomophia* has been used on her.' And I replied, 'It are wholly likely, Jules de Grandin.'

"Very well, then. Let us experiment. It has been some time since she was dosed with this medicine which steals her volition, yet her look and bearing and the senseless manner she repeats our words back at

us reminds me greatly of one whom I had seen in Paris when the gendarmes had administered *scopolamin apomorphia* to him.

"*Bien alors*, I did bid her rise and hurt herself. Only a person whose instinct of self-preservation has been blocked would go and put his hand in living flame merely because another told him to, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Yet she did do it, and without protest. As calmly as though I requested that she eat a bonbon, she rose and crossed the room and thrust her so sweet finger into searing flame. *La pauvre!* I did hate myself to see her do it, yet I knew that unless she did I must inevitably hate her. The case is proved, good Friend Trowbridge. We have no need to feel resentful toward her. The one we saw bow down before the devil's altar, the one we saw take part in their vile rites, was not our Mademoiselle Alice. No, by no means. It was but her poor image, the flesh which she is clothed in. The real girl whom we sought, and whom we brought away with us, was absent, for her personality, her consciousness and volition were stolen by those evil men exactly as they stole the little boys they slew upon the altar of the devil."

I nodded, much relieved. His argument was convincing, and I was eager to be convinced.

"Now we have sunk her in a sleep of morphine, she will rest easily," he finished. "Later we shall see how she progresses, and if conditions warrant it, tomorrow young John Davisson shall once more hold his *amoureuse* against his heart. Yes. That will be a happy day for me.

"Shall we rejoin the others? We have much to talk about; and that Renouard, how well I know him! the bottle will be empty if we do not hasten!"

"So I hanged the blighters out of hand," the stranger was telling Renouard as de Grandin and I rejoined them in the study.

"Admirable. Superb. I approve," Renouard returned, then rose and bowed with jack-knife formality to the stranger, de Grandin and me in turn. "Jules, Doctor Trowbridge," he announced, "permit that I make you acquaint' with Monsieur le Baron Ingraham, late of His Majesty's *gendarmerie* in Sierra Leone—Monsieur le Baron, Doctor Jules de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge. I am Inspector Renouard of the *Service-Surete*."

Smilingly the stranger acknowledged the introductions, adding: "It ain't quite as bad as the Inspector makes it out, gentlemen. My pater happened to leave me a baronetcy—with no money to support the title

— but you'd hardly call me a baron, I fear. As to the *gendarmérie*, I was captain in the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, but— "

"Exactly, precisely, quite so," Renouard interjected. "It is as I said. Monsieur le Baron's experiences strangely parallel my own. Tell them, if you please, Monsieur le Bar— "

"Give over!" cried the other sharply. "I can't have you Monsieur le Baronning me all over the place, you know— it gives me the hump! My sponsors in baptism named me Haddingway Ingraham Jameson Ingraham — H-I-J-I, you know— and I'm known in the service as 'Hiji'. Why not compromise on that— we're all policemen here, I take it?"

"All but Doctor Trowbridge, who has both the courage and the wit to qualify," de Grandin answered. "Now, Monsieur Hiji, you were about to tell Inspector Renouard— " He paused with upraised eyebrows.

The big Englishman produced a small, black pipe and a tin of Three Nuns, slowly tamped tobacco in the briar and eyed us quizzically. He was even bigger than I'd thought at first, and despite his prematurely whitened hair, much younger than I'd estimated. Thirty-one or two at most, I guessed. "How strong is your credulity?" he asked at length.

"*Parbleu*, it is marvelous, magnificent," declared de Grandin. "We can believe that which we know is false, if you can prove it to us!"

"It'll take a lot of believing," Ingraham answered, "but it's all true, just the same.

"A year or so ago, about the time Inspector Renouard was beginning to investigate the missing girls, queer rumors began trickling back to Freetown from the Reserved Forest Areas. We've always had leopard societies in the back country—gangs of cannibals who disguise themselves as leopards and go out stalking victims for their ritual feasts— of course, but this seemed something rather new. Someone was stirring up the natives to a *poro*— an oath-bound resistance to government. The victims of the latest leopard outrages were men who failed to subscribe to the rebellion. Several village headmen and sub-chiefs had been popped into the pot by the leopard men, and the whole area was getting in an awful state of funk.

"Nobody wants to go up in the Reserved Forests, so they sent me. 'Let good old Hiji do it; Hiji's the lad for this show!' they said; so I took a dozen Houssa policemen, two Lewis guns and ten pounds or so of quinine and set out.

"Ten days back in the brush we ran across the leopards' spoor. We'd stopped at a Mendi village and I sent word forward for the headman to come out. He didn't come.

"That wasn't so good. If I waited too long for him outside the place I'd lose face; if I went in to him after summoning him to come to me; he would have 'put shame on me.' Finally I compromised by going in alone.

"The chief lolled before his hut with his warriors and women around him, and it didn't take more than half an eye to see he'd placed no seat for me.

"'I see you, Chief,' I told him, swaggering forward with the best assurance I could summon. I also saw that he was wearing a string of brummagem beads about his neck, as were most of his warriors, and wondered at it, for no license had been issued to a trader recently, and we'd had no reports of white men in the section for several years.

"'I see you, white man,' he replied, but made no move to rise or offer me a seat.

"'Why do you thus put shame upon the King-Emperor's representative?' I demanded.

"'We want no dealings with the Emperor-King, or any of his men,' the fellow answered. 'The land is ours, the English have no right here; we will have no more of him.' The patter rattled off his tongue as glibly as though he had been a soap-box orator preaching communism in Hyde Park.

"This was rank sedition, not at all the sort of thing to be countenanced, you know, so I went right for the blighter. 'Get up from there, you unholy rotter,' I ordered, 'and tell your people you have spoken with a crooked tongue, or—'

"It was a lucky thing for me I'm handy with my feet. A spear came driving at me, missing me by less than half an inch, and another followed it, whistling past my head so close I felt the wind of it.

"Fortunately, my men were hiding just outside, and Bendingo, my half-caste Arab sergeant, was a willing worker with the Entfield. He shot the foremost spearman through the head before the fellow had a chance to throw a second weapon, and the other men began to shoot before you could say 'knife'. It was a gory business, and we'd rather killed half the poor beggars before they finally called it quits.

"The chief was most apologetic when the fracas ended, of course, and swore he had been misled by white men who spoke with crooked tongues.

"This was interesting. It seemed, from what the beggar told me, there had been several white men wandering at large through the area distributing what would be equivalent to radical literature at home—preaching armed and violent rebellion to government and all that sort of thing.

Furthermore, they'd told the natives the brummagem beads they gave 'em would act as 'medicine' against the white man's bullets, and that no one need fear to raid a mission station or refuse to pay the hut-tax, for England had been overthrown and only a handful of Colonial administrators remained—no army to come to their rescue if the natives were to rise and wipe 'em out.

"This was bad enough, but worse was coming. It appeared these playful little trouble-makers were preaching miscegenation. This was something new. The natives had never regarded themselves as inferior beings, for it's strictly against regulations to say or do anything tending to do more than make 'em respect the whites as agents of the government, but they'd never—save in the rarest instances—attempted to take white women. Oh, yes, they killed 'em sometimes, often with torture, but that was simply part of the game—no chivalry, you know. But these white agitators were deliberately urging the Timni, Mendis and Sulima to raid settlements and mission stations and spare the women that they might be carried off as prizes.

"That was plenty. Right there the power of the British rule had to be shown, so I rounded up all the villagers who hadn't taken to the woods, told 'em they'd been misled by lying white men whom I'd hang as soon as caught, then strung the chief up to the nearest oil-palm. His neck muscles were inordinately strong and he died in circumstances of considerable elaboration and discomfort, but the object lesson was worth while. There'd be no more defiance of a government agent by *that* gang.

"We were balked at every turn. Most of our native informers had been killed and eaten, and the other blacks were sullen. Not a word could we get from 'em regarding leopard depredations, and they shut up like a lot of clams when we asked about the white trouble-makers.

"We'd never have gotten anywhere if it hadn't been for Old Man Anderson. He was a Wesleyan missionary who ran a little chapel and clinic 'way up by the French border. His wife and daughter helped him. He might have loved his God; he certainly had a strange love for his womenfolk to bring 'em into that stinkin' hellhole.

It was a month after our brush with the Mendi when we crashed through the jungle to Anderson's. The place was newly raided, burned and leveled to the ground, ashes still warm. What was left of the old man we found by the burned chapel—all except his head. They'd taken that away for a souvenir. We found the bodies of several of his converts, too. They'd been flayed, their skins stripped off as you'd turn off a glove. His wife and daughter were nowhere to be found.

"They hadn't taken any special pains to cover up their tracks, and we followed at a forced march. We came upon 'em three days later.

"The blighters had eaten 'emselves loggy, and drunk enough trade-gin to float the *Berengaria*, so they didn't offer much resistance when we charged. I'd always thought a man who slaughtered unresisting enemies was a rotten beast, but the memory of old Anderson's dismembered body and those pink, skinless corpses made me revise my notion. We came upon 'em unawares, opened with the Lewis guns from both sides of the village and didn't sound cease firin' till the dead lay round like logwood corded in a lumber camp. Then, and not till then, we went in.

"We found old Mrs. Anderson dead, but still warm. She'd—I think you can imagine what she'd been through, gentlemen.

"We found the daughter, too. Not quite dead.

"In the four days since her capture she'd been abused by more than a hundred men, black and white, and was barely breathing when we came on her. She—"

"White and black, *Monstieur ?*" de Grandin interrupted.

"Right-o. The raiding party had been led by whites. Five of 'em. Stripped off their clothes and put on native ornaments, carried native weapons, and led the blacks in their hellish work. Indeed, I don't believe the poor black beggars would have gone out against the 'Jesus Papa' if those white hellions hadn't set 'em up to it.

"They'd regarded Rebekah Anderson as good as dead, and made no secret of their work. The leader was a Russian, so were two of his assistants. A fourth was Polish and the last some sort of Asiatic—a Turk, the poor child thought.

"They'd come up through Liberia, penetrated the Protectorate and set the natives up to devilment, finally organizing the raid on Anderson's. Now their work was done, and they were on their way.

"She heard the leader say he was going to America, for in Harrisonville, New Jersey, the agents of his society had found a woman whom they sought and who would lead some sort of movement against organized religion. The poor kid didn't understand it all—no more did I—but she heard it, and remembered.

"The white men had left the night before, striking east into French Guinea on their way to the coast, and leaving her as a plaything for the natives.

"Before the poor child died she told me the Russian in command had been a man with a slender, almost boyish body, but with the wrinkled

face of an old man. She's seen him stripped for action, you know, and was struck by the strange contrast of his face and body.

"One other thing she told me: When they got to America they intended holding meetings of their damned society, and the road to their rendezvous would be directed by pictures of the Devil with his pitchfork pointing the way the person seeking it should take. She didn't understand, of course, but—I had all the clues I wanted, and as soon as we got back to Freeown I got a leave of absence to hunt that foul murderer down and bring him to justice."

The young man paused a moment to relight his pipe, and there was something far from pleasant in his lean and sun-burned face as he continued: "Rebekah Anderson went to her gravelikean old Sumerian queen. I impounded every man who'd had a hand in the raid and put 'em to work diggin' a grave for her, then a big, circular trench around it. Then I hanged 'em and dumped their carcasses into the trench to act as guard of honor for the girl they'd killed. You couldn't bribe a native to go near the place, now.

"I was followin' the little pictures of the Devil when Renouard set on me. I mistook him for one of 'em of course, and—well, it's a lucky thing for all of Costello bashed me when he did."

De Grandin's little, round blue eyes were alight with excitement and appreciation. "And how did you escape, *Monsieur*?" he asked.

The Englishman laughed shortly. "Got a pair of handcuffs?" he demanded.

"I have," supplied Renouard.

"Lock 'em on me."

The manacles clicked round his wrists and he turned to us with a grin. "Absolutely no deception, gentlemen, nothing concealed in the hands, nothing up the sleeves," he announced in a droning sing-song, then, as easily as though slipping them through his shirt sleeves, drew his hands through the iron bracelets. "Just a matter of small bones and limber muscles," he added with another smile. "Being double-jointed helps some, too. It was no trick at all to slip the darbies off when the constables joined Costello for the raid. I put the irons on the other person—locked 'em on his ankles—so the boys would find 'em when they came back to the motor."

"But—" Renouard began, only to pause with the next word half uttered. From upstairs came a quavering little frightened cry, like the tremulous call of a screech-owl or of a child in mortal terror.

"No noise!" de Grandin warned as he leaped from his seat and

bounded up the stairway three steps at a time, Renouard and Ingraham close behind him.

We raced on tiptoe down the upper hall and paused a second by the bedroom door; then de Grandin kicked it open.

Alice crouched upon the bed, half raised upon one elbow, her other arm bent guardingly across her face. The red robe we had put upon her when we fled the Devil's temple had fallen back, revealing her white throat and whiter breast, her loosened hair fell across her shoulders.

Close by the open window, like a beast about to spring, crouched a man. Despite his changed apparel, his heavy coat and tall, peaked cap of astrakhan, we recognized him in a breath. Those big, sad eyes fixed on the horror-stricken girl, that old and wrinkle-bitten face, could be none other's than the red priest's. His slender, almost womanish hands were clenched to talons, every muscle of his little, spare frame was taut—stretched harp-string tight for the leap he poised to make. Yet there was no malignancy—hardly any interest—in his old, close-wrinkled face. Rather, it seemed to me, he looked at her a gaze of brooding speculation.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur du Diable*, you honor us too much; this call was wholly unexpected!" de Grandin said, as he stepped quickly forward.

Quick as he was, the other man was quicker. One glance—one murderous glance which seemed to focus all the hate and fury of a thwarted soul—he cast upon the Frenchman, then leaped back through the window.

Crash! de Grandin's pistol-shot seemed like a clap of thunder in the room as he fired at the retreating form, and a second shot sped through the window as the intruder landed on the snow below and staggered toward the street.

"Winged him, by Jove!" the Englishman cried exultantly. "Nice-shooting, Frenchy!"

"Nice be damned and roasted on the grates of hell—" de Grandin answered furiously. "Is he not free?"

They charged downstairs, leaving me to comfort Alice, and I heard their voices as they searched the yard. Ten minutes later they returned, breathing heavily from their efforts, but empty-handed.


"Slipped through us like an eel!" the Englishman exclaimed. "Must have had a motor waiting at the curb, and—"

"*Sacre nom d'un nom d'un nom!*" de Grandin stormed. "What are they thinking of, those stupid-heads? Is not he charged with murder? Yes, *pardieu*, yet they let him roam about at will, and—it is monstrous; it is vile; it is not to be endured!"

Snatching up the telephone he called police headquarters, then:—"What means this, Sergeant?" he demanded when Costello answered. "We sit here like four *sacre* fools and think ourselves secure, and that one—that so vile murderer—comes breaking in the house and—what? *Pas possible!*"

"It is, sor," we heard Costello's answer as de Grandin held the receiver from his ear. "That bur-rd ye handed me is in is cell this minute; an' furthermore, he's been there every second since we locked 'im up!"

The Satanists have more weapons in their arsenal, and have not despaired of their plan to make Alice Hume the Bride of the Prophecy. de Grandin and his friends find themselves up against the battle of their lives in the concluding chapter of this novel, in our July issue.



Good News For Collectors

A few copies of issue #14 of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* (Winter 1966/67) have been found.

This issue contains the following stories: *The Lair of the Star-Spawn*, August Derleth and Mark Schorer; *The Vacant Lot*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *Proof*, S. Fowler Wright; *Comes Now The Power*, Roger Zelazny; *The Friendly Demon*, Daniel DeFore; *Dark Hollow*, Emil Petaja; *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, Ambrose Bierce; and *The Monster-God of Mamurth*, Edmond Hamilton.

While they last, they will be available at the original cover price of of 50 cents per copy postpaid, but we must remind you that we cannot accept orders for just one single issue of a magazine, the minimum order being \$1.00.

It Is Written...

Usually, when *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* appear in the same month, something which happens twice a year under our present schedule, I prepare all the copy for MOH and send it off to the printer before getting to SMS. Actually, it does not make any difference which of the two is done first, as the two issues I handle every month are always rolled together—"two up" they call it. The habit's a hangover from the old days when each issue to be shipped during a certain month had a separate printing and shipping deadline, so that it was important that the bi-monthly titles be finished earlier than the quarterly ones. We all get to be creatures of habit in one way or another, and even though I know intellectually that it doesn't make a particle of difference which of my two titles I prepare and send off first, I cannot help but feel a little uneasy about having done SMS before MOH this time.

But one interesting side-effect is that *both* reader's departments were typed at a time when two stories in the issue were in an exact tie, and in both instances, the stories involved had been bouncing in and out of first place, or ties for the lead, for some weeks. Right now, the tie I referred to in *The Cauldron* has been broken; but the margin of lead is so small that the next preference coupon, letter, or postcard that comes in

is almost sure either to restore the tie or reverse the present order of the top two tales. You, of course, will see in *The Reckoning* how it all ended; with MOH, I haven't the foggiest notion of whether James Blish or Clark Ashton Smith will come out on top, or whether it will be a dead heat. The margin between these two and the contender for third place is wide enough so as to make it unlikely that both will be left behind.

As you know, we rarely publish letters complete here, although we frequently print extended excerpts. Nor do we necessarily begin with the opening paragraph. However (someone asked me about this), when you see an ellipsis (. . .) at the end of a paragraph, you know that something was deleted at that point; and the same goes anywhere else you see an ellipsis. If the letter itself contains ellipses in passages that I decide to publish, they are changed to one-em dashes (-). You, the readers, have shown confidence that I will not abridge your comments in such a way as to make you appear to say the exact opposite of what you actually wrote, and I trust I have not done so unintentionally—certainly I have never done so with deliberate intent.

Mr. J. C. Henneberger, who was the original publisher of *WEIRD TALES*, writes (and this letter we shall reproduce in full): "My dear Lowndes;

Yesterday I picked up a copy of the *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* from among a veritable cesspool of reading matter that seemingly catered to the entire gamut of human feeling.

"I could not forego the pleasure of re-reading *The Colossus of Ylourgne*, but was also rewarded by reading *The Editor's Page*, which brought back memories of long ago.

"Anent Lovecraft, I hasten to correct an impression of yours about featuring this writer on the cover of a magazine. I presume, therefore, that you are not familiar with a story that appeared in *WEIRD TALES*, *Imprisoned With The Pharaohs*, attributed to Houdini but written in its entirety by Lovecraft.

"Briefly, the circumstances were as follows:

"Not long after I had inaugurated *WEIRD TALES*, I had a call by Houdini at my Chicago office; he expressed more than usual enthusiasm for the magazine, and the meeting resulted in a friendship lasting until his untimely death a few years later. He often regaled me with experiences of his that rivaled anything I had ever read in books. Several of these I published, but they were written in such a prosaic style that they evoked little comment.

"However, one day he unfolded one astounding story of a trip to Egypt that I knew only a Lovecraft or a Clark Ashton Smith could do justice to. Lovecraft did a masterful job on the outline and details I sent him, but asked not to have his name associated with publication. This pleased Houdini, who received full credit for Lovecraft's work.

"I received scores of letters from readers for not giving due credit to Lovecraft. These letters I foolishly

loaned to an acquaintance whom I accuse of selling them to a nationally known writer; and a nationally known magazine, *ESQUIRE*, some time later published an article, *The Cult of Lovecraft*, which article not exactly demeaning Lovecraft would not have met his approval, I am sure.

"As for Ed Baird, nominally the first editor of WT, or Farnsworth Wright, whom I employed to succeed him, both had a high regard of Lovecraft, but both men were writers first when I got to know them and editors later. I always felt a good editor could take any writer with a spark of genius and help him develop, but no editor can eradicate jealousy between writers who have been published.

"The cover of *WEIRD TALES* containing the story, *Imprisoned With the Pharaohs*, depicted a scene of the Giza Plateau with the title prominently displayed but, alas the authorship was credited to Houdini. It was a mistake of mine. I had a great regard for this writer of retiring nature, and respected his wish. Now that he is gone, I am certain that his popularity has surpassed that of Poe and certainly that of Bierce. I recall everything I read by Poe, and of Bierce only one tale: *The Damned Thing*."

My impression has always been that Mr. Wright's editorship of *WEIRD TALES* started with the November 1924 issue—the one after the Anniversary Issue whereon the cover illustrating Lovecraft's "Houdini" story appeared; however, I agree that not mentioning this—as I have in the past when referring to Mr. Wright's neglect in this respect—could easily leave the impression that WT never ran a cover illustrat-

ing anything by H. P. Lovecraft.

It was news to me, however, that HPL wrote the entire "Houdini" story from scratch, as I'd assumed that he had had a manuscript to work from. And having read *The Hoax of the Spirit Lover*, in a copy of the April 1924 WT that I had at one time, I can certainly agree with you that Houdini's magic prowess did not include writing: "prosaic" is the exact word for his style. I never saw *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, though until it was reprinted in the June-July 1939 issue. (Incidentally, for those of you who haven't seen much Lovecraftiana, HPL finished the manuscript just before his marriage, and accidentally lost it; so in order to meet the deadline, his wedding night was spent at the typewriter, doing it over.)

Mark Owings writes: "A '1' to Clark Ashton Smith. The story struck me as nice but unspectacular when I first read it, but now I wonder what sort of person could have held that opinion. If my tastes have changed that much in five years, than I should re-read everything I offer opinions on (which is everything) that I read before 1963 (which I haven't the time for.) Again, a request for as much Smith as the traffic will bear.

"A '2' to Meredith. A much better story than the first time out, and a nice one by any standards. I rather wish the locket had been explained, since the story seems untidy this way, but even so.

"A '3' to Rousseau—though it would have made a better story to have the god *get* somewhere. (I think the god had a name, despite Rousseau, but I can't find any Mayan

histories, only Aztec and Incan. Probably haven't even brought them up from Baltimore.)

"A '4' to Blish. This also improves with a second reading, now attaining to mediocrity. The pianist's playing Scriabin is intriguing; the only well-known items are the 'Black Mass sonata' and the 'Divine tone-poem'. The latter seems jarringly out-of-place for that scene and the former seems overly melodramatic for a choice. But music is not my pidgin . . .

"It is odd; I've noticed myself that a reaction to Lovecraft is either strong positive or strong negative, but one to CAS is either strong positive or neutral . . .

"O, shush! A Hugo for MOH would be perfectly proper; 'science fiction' implies 'fantasy' these days. Three of the four nominees at the Baycon were straight fantasy, and the fourth was only slightly bent. Damn near *nothing* written would qualify as 'scientification' by Gernsback's view (including much of what he published.)"

What sort of person could have held the opinion of *The Colossus of Ylourgne* you yourself held five years ago? Elementary! The sort of person you actually *were* five years ago.

Seriously, if one is an omniverous reader, one's tastes should alter, and sometimes change startlingly every now and then. And certainly if one is alert and given to expressing one's opinion—well, Mark Twain summed up the situation when he used to say that no matter what he said today, he reserved the right to contradict himself tomorrow. All of which is just one reason why it's good to revisit reading matter which you thought particularly splendid the last

time around— or, at times, which you thought you ought to appreciate, but didn't, if there are any in that category. It would seem rather doubtful that the change would be anything like all-over, the odds being that were you to re-read everything, you'd feel about the same in respect to most of it. The really worthwhile material, though, might seem better just because you've grown in your capacity to respond through the experience of five years' living and reading. But re-reading everything, even if there were time, wouldn't be very intelligent unless you were stuck in a position where nothing new was available.

I still consider the problem of what one labels "science fiction" a very unhappy one. The term is be-

coming almost as meaningless as the term "hi fi", and the question seems to be coming to this: What are the marks or standards through which we can determine that a given exhibit is *not* science fiction?

Arthur Remmers writes from Atlanta: "I'm one of those old-fashioned lovers of gothic stories who never cottoned to *UNKNOWN* and the smart-aleck, wise-guy approach to weird fiction. And I stopped reading *WEIRD TALES* when Robert Bloch, who had showed promise back in the 30s, was encouraged to turn out tedious and stupid burlesques. I think a weird or, horror story should be essentially disturbing in the frightening sense. Not that the reader needs to be genuinely terrified, but in the sense that *if* I believed in this

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Jules de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge

THE VENGEANCE OF INDIA

appears in the Winter #11 issue of

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a money-saving remedy on page 125*

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Benett Foster

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the tale of Urus,
king of the Buffalo,
and a lone frontiers-
man's struggle to
save his herd

by
Edison Marshall

THE FIDDLING KID

a different story
by
Bertrand W. Sinclair

*Issue #1 is now on sale— or
see page 125*

sort of thing then I really would be in a cold sweat.

"That is why I was so pleasantly surprised by James Blish's *There Shall Be No Darkness*. I know that I have seen his name on magazine covers and on pocket book covers but these have all been science fiction so far as I could see, and that form of fiction holds very little interest for me. Perhaps the stories are better written these days . . . they were very badly written at the time I tried to read some.

"But this story is almost as good as the horror tales with a scientific cast to them that H. G. Wells has given us . . .

"Your policy is a very good one, in that you make no effort to fill an entire issue with actual tales of horror. It is very easy to say you should only read the stories one at a time and allow time to pass between reading any two, but that takes a great deal of will power to effect. When I have an issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* on hand, I like to read several stories at a sitting. That is why I rarely bother with anthologies. The stories are often well chosen, but not for continuous reading."

William M. Danner, editor of *STEFANTASY*, writes from Kennerdell, Penna: "You'll no doubt be surprised at my putting Smith first but in this issue I think it belongs there. Despite a style I find unattractive, the story held my interest. By actual count there are only 44 lines of dialog, and that pretty stilted, in the whole 32 1/2 pages . . . I can't help commenting upon one thing in Blish's story: the fact that Doris Gilmore was clad in a houseboat. This

curious typo occurs not once but twice, and I can't help feeling that wrapping a houseboat tightly about a slim waist is quite an accomplishment. I suppose the typographer was typing in a trance or something . . .

"You've proved your point that there is a place for magazines that are largely reprints; it is very seldom that you include a story I have read before. One such case is *A Psychological Invasion*; I was able to get down my copy of *The Tales of Algernon Blackwood*, published by Dutton and printed in Great Britain in 1939, and finish the story without a long wait."

I deleted your nonetheless welcome remarks about an improvement in the general appearance of the magazine during the past year or so. I never did get to visit the composition office, which is one reason why the little essay on the process that I had in mind to write did not get written. I will say, however, that the process itself has innumerable bugs in it, one of them being that the compositor could strike the correct key on the keyboard, but the holes in that tape that striking that key should make would not come out correctly, so that another letter or symbol would print instead.

There are also bugs in the correcting process. Proof sheets are delivered to me; I make a preliminary pasteup of each page (having read the sheets first in order to mark places where copy is missing and note any typographical errors that strike my eye at once—but this go around is mainly for the purpose of spotting words, phrases, or lines omitted entirely) and then do a complete proof-reading, always finding more errors than

COMING SOON

THE PHANTOM DRUG by A. W. Kapfer

Have You Missed These Issues?

#1, August 1963: *Out of print.*

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H.G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampires* (article), Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslammer*, Donald A. Wohlheim; *The Electric Chair*, George Walcott; *The Other One*, Jerry L. Keane; *The Chamber*, Archie Binas; *Clarissa*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, Rudyard Kipling.

#3, February 1964: *Out of print.*

#4, May 1964: *Out of print.*

#5, September 1964: *Cassius*, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, by J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Proulx; *The Beautiful Sad*, H.G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wohlheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

#6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Wards*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fracton*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heddiger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

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COMING SOON**THE ROAD TO NOWHERE**

by Robert A. W. Lowndes

Have You Missed These Issues?

7, January 1965: *The Thing from—Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way with Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E.B. Marriott—Watson; *The Shattered Room*, H.P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R.H.D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Pussey*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack, Reynold Junker*; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings;

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H.F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Sins of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H.G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.

#10, August 1965: *The Gbriat Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Priluck; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placidie's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

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those which caught my eye the first time. These are marked. When the compositors make the master dummy, following my layout for position of type, artwork, etc., the words or lines with errors noted are re-set, and this re-set material cut out and pasted over the original, faulty material. The master dummy is then returned to me for a final check.

What can happen, and has happened, is that after I have noted with satisfaction that an error was corrected, the pasted-over type can fall off, so that the original faulty line is finally printed just as if I had never noticed the error at all. Or final corrections may be made, too late to allow for my checking them, and these corrections may include new errors.

When I see a typo in the completed magazine, many hundreds of thousands of words later, I can seldom be certain just where the fault lies—whether (a) I missed the error from the very first (b) I did not notice that it was not corrected, or that something else went wrong in the process (c) I corrected a new error but it either was not followed through or pasted-over type fell off. Since human imperfection and failure exists on every level of the process, I accept one third of the liability—I do not see everything. The compositors should be charged with one third, too; but the final third is due to the bugs in the system which sometimes defeats us all even when we are alert and conscientious on our highest level.

The pressure of time schedules all around prevents perfection in working around such bugs. I know that both compositors and printers are aware of the difficulties and make

Coming Next Issue

He broke off short and started forward with outstretched arms. For no sooner had she reached the threshold of the room which contained the unnamed mummy than she uttered a low, strangled cry and staggered back, limp and nerveless. Half leading, half carrying, he got her to the nearest chair and prepared to go in search of a glass of water. But she stopped him with a sudden gesture.

"It is nothing," she said, though her trembling lips and ashy features belied her words. "A sudden faintness, that is all. I shall be better soon."

He looked from her to the unopened mummy-case. Deep down in his mind a suspicion was beginning to form that the coming of this strange girl was intimately connected with the mummy that he was on the point of exposing. Moreover, he could have sworn it was the sight of the case which had called forth the display of emotion he had just witnessed.

"It seems as if this mummy-case is not entirely unknown to you," he said slowly.

She inclined her dark head with a gesture of assent.

"I have seen it . . . once . . . many years ago," she answered hesitatingly. "And . . . that is the reason of my presence here."

"I knew it!" cried Peter Venn triumphantly.

With a quick movement that somehow reminded him of the sinuous glide of a panther, the girl rose to her feet and came toward him. Beautiful though her face was, there was now a look on it that filled him with vague alarm. The red lips were set and determined; the eyes held in their starry depths the blaze of an indomitable will. She glided so close to him that he could feel her warm breath fanning his cheeks.

"You will open that mummy-case tonight, after the museum is closed," she said, speaking in low, hurried tones. "I will be present, and after we have seen what we shall see—I will tell you such a story as human ears have never listened to before."

Don't miss this tale of the weird events that followed the unwrapping of an unidentified Egyptian mummy, and the amazing story told to Peter Venn.

THE NAMELESS MUMMY

by Arlton Eadie

Have You Missed These Issues?

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was it a Dream*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hawth Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Grege la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Munching, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A.W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL* (article), Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredity*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

#14, Winter 1966/67: Out of print.

#15, Spring 1967: *The Room of Shadows*, Arthur J. Burks; *Lilies*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Flax*, J. Vernon Shea; *The Doom of London*, Robert Barr; *The Vals of Lost Women*, Robert E. Howard; *The Ghoul Gallery*, Hugh B. Cave.

#16, Summer 1967: *Night and Silence*, Maurice Level; *Lazarus*, Leonid Andreyev; *Mr. Octbur*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Dog That Laughed*, Charles Willard Duffin; *Ah, Sweet Youth*, Pauline Kappel Pritchard; *The Man Who Never Was*, R. A. Lafferty; *The London Ring*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Monster of the Prophecy*, Clark Ashton Smith.

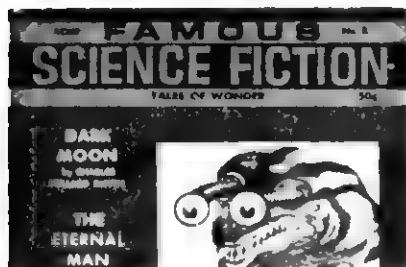
an earnest effort to overcome them. But each of us, eventually (and that can be very soon at times), come up to the point where it is not possible to make that extra scrutiny that used to be made as a matter of course back in the days when publishing moved at a more leisurely pace.

So maybe those "houseboats" actually were corrected after all—but corrected in vain. I told Jim Blish about your discovery, and he had a hearty laugh over it; ending with the following blessing: "May all your typos be funny ones."

John Salter writes from Detroit, "I had a lot of trouble deciding which of the two main stories in the January issue was better. Both were outstanding and I was tempted at first to put them down as a tie. Then a thought came to me as a reason for giving one a slight margin: *There Shall Be No Darkness* is positively the best treatment of the werewolf legend that I have ever read and a intensely moving story to boot. *The Colossus of Ylourgne* is a wonderful story but I have read others by Clark Ashton Smith that I found no less enjoyable. So while both are outstanding, Blish does stand out over and above Smith this time.

"It seems pretty clear to me that *The Phantom Ship* is the final chapter of a novel, and maybe a long novel at that. There are definite references to material that is not here and I believe would have been here had this been a complete short story. But I'm glad to see this excerpt and vote in favor of your doing this sort of thing once in a while. Not more than once a year, and not every year just for the sake of doing it."

You're right: *The Phantom Ship*



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Have You Missed These Issues?

#17, Fall 1967: *A Sense of Cruelty*, Robert Edmond Alter; *The Laughing-Dinks*, Wallace West; *Dermot's Bane*, Robert E. Howard; *The Spell of the Sword*, Frank Aubrey; "Williamson", Henry S. Whitehead; *The Curse Of Aman-Bo*, Victor Reppert.

#18, November 1967: *In Amundsen's Tent*, John Martin Leahy; *Transient and Immortal*, Jim Haught; *Out of the Deep*, Robert E. Howard; *The Bibliophile*, Thomas Boyd; *The Ultimate Creature*, R. A. Lafferty; *Wolves of Darkness*, Jack Williamson.

#19, January 1968: *The Red Witch*, Nitzin Dyalhis; *The Last Letter From Norman Underwood*, Larry Eugene Meredith; *The Jewels of Vishnu*, Harriet Bennett; *The Man From Cincinnati*, Holloway Horn; *Ground Afire*, Anna Hunger; *The Wind In The Rose-Bush*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Last of Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *The Years are as a Knife*, (verse) Robert E. Howard.

#20, March 1968: *The Stren of the Snakes*, Arlton Eadie; *The Rack*, G. G. Ketcham; *A Cry From Beyond*, Victor Rousseau; *Only Gone Before*, Emil Petaja; *The Voice*, Nell Kay; *The Monsters*, Murray Leinster.

#21, May 1968: *Kings of the Night*, Robert E. Howard; *The Cunning of Pivonk Rogoff*, David A. English; *The Brabblers*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Psychical Invasion* (part one), Algernon Blackwood; *Nasturtia*, Col. S. P. Meek; *The Dark Star*, G. G. Pendarves.

Order From Page 128

is a novel, Lin Carter tells me, and perhaps in the next issue I'll be able to give you more detailed information about it. Opinion as to whether we should or should not do this sort of thing once in a while seems to be pretty well split between approval and disapproval.

C. J. Probert of Ontario, who reverses Mr. Salter's vote on the Blish and Smith stories, goes on to say: "... Incidentally, is 'Yar Grenue' in *The Writings of Elwin Adams* supposed to be Smith or not? If so, the comment is true, for Smith rarely wrote a true horror tale—except for *The Seed from the Sepulchre* and a few others.

"I enjoyed *The Writings of Elwin Adams* even more than *The Last Letter from Norman Underwood*. The concept of Lovecraft (who, I assume, is E. A.) haunting the author is intriguing. Meredith, along with Richard Hodgins, is a good writer. Please don't reject a story from him just because it is too long . . . I'm sorry that I can't get too worked up about Steffan B. Aletti, but then that may be me . . .

"About two months ago, I wrote a rather vitriolic letter about David H. Keller, M. D. This month, after reading your comments in the *It Is Written* section and in your editorial, I decided to explain more fully.

"I don't mind the style of *The Abyss* as Gene D'Orsogna's literary prof. does—in fact, I thought it was very powerfully written. It's just that I was disgusted with myself for having read it at all. It's just an opinion; I'm only 16, and I have been wrong, or misled before.

"Perhaps I dislike Keller because of the first tale I read by him—it was

a piece anthologized in Derleth's *When Evil Wakes*, perhaps—*A Piece of Linoleum*. It repelled me and probably made me biased against Keller from the start."

Which reminds me of that old line, "Even if that was good, I wouldn't like it!" But it's happened to me, too; I've been repelled by the very first story I read by an author, and it has been a struggle to get myself to read anything further by him/her, or find any merit in such other stories. It does not happen now so often as it may have happened in the past, but I'd only be deceiving myself were I to try to pretend that it never happens now.

One way of dealing with this, outside of forcing yourself to read more by the same author right now, is simply to acknowledge that this is the way you feel, without defending your feelings, or apologizing for them, and put the author aside for the time being. Perhaps in years to come, you may feel that you want to try again; fine—you'll be a somewhat different person then, and you may see things differently in regard to this author. There is no guarantee of this, but it could happen.

But letting yourself be put on the defensive in regard to your present feelings (present at any time, not just this moment) will do nothing for you at all. It won't change anyone else's opinions, and it will tend to make you less capable of changing—in effect, building a wall around yourself.

I'll leave it to Mr. Meredith to answer your question about "Yar Grenue" and risk being in error myself by saying I doubt that he had Clark Ashton Smith in mind. RAWL

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#23, September 1968: *The Abyss* (part one), David H. Keller, M.D.; *The Death Mask*, Mrs. H. D. Everett; *One By One*, Richard M. Hodgins; *The Thirteenth Floor*, Douglas M. Dold; *Leapers*, Robert A. W. Lowndes.

#24, November 1968: *Once in a Thousand Years*, Frances Bragg Middleton; *The Eye of Horus*, Stefan B. Aletti; *4 Prose Poems: Memory, What the Moon Brings, Nyarlathotep, Ex Oblivione*, H.P. Lovecraft; *A Diagnosis of Death*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Abyss* (part two), David H. Keller, M.D.

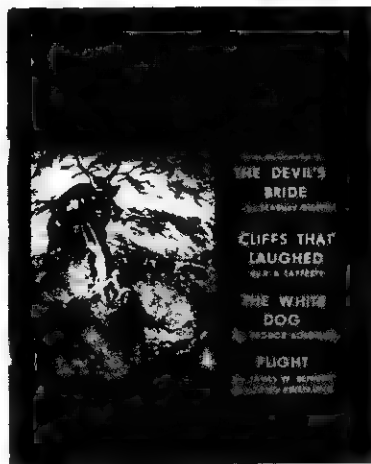
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#27, March 1969: *The Devil's Bride* (part one), Seabury Quinn; *The Oak Tree*, David H. Keller, M. D.; *The Milk Carts*, Violet A. Methley; *Cliffs That Laughed*, R. A. Laferty; *Flight*, James W. Bennett & Soong Kwen-Ling; *The White Dog*, Feodor Sologub.

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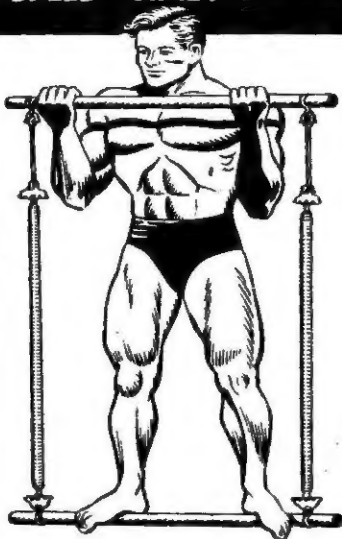
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